GREGORY OF TOURS AND THE WOMEN IN HIS WORKS

Studies in Sixth-Century Gaul

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Submitted in Accordance with the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of History

February, 2011

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that the appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

2011

The University of Leeds

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Acknowledgements

ABSTRACT

As one of the most prolific authors of the sixth-century, Gregory of Tours has long been a figure of interest in studies on Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Gregory's works are difficult sources to use, in large part because of his skill as an author, as well as his ability to manipulate his material in accordance with his greater literary aims. Much of what Gregory wrote, and much of what he chose not to write, resulted from his own relationship with the political and ecclesiastical leadership of Merovingian Gaul. Therefore, it has proved necessary to identify Gregory's historical context, as well as his opinions on contemporary issues, before utilising his works for scholarly purposes. While much work has been done in this regard, it has tended to focus more on various male figures – kings, bishops, magnates, and the like – rather than on the women in his works, even though several women feature prominently in both his writings and his life. This study opens with an examination of the influence that Gregory's own mother had upon him, and the way she left her mark on his works. It then analyses Gregory's opinions on various political leaders, such as the famous queens Brunhild and Fredegund, before turning to his ideas about gender, female sanctity, and laywomen. Along the way, opportunities are taken to examine certain historical issues, from the question of polygamy amongst the Merovingian royalty to the matter of cultural divisions with Gaul, in light of Gregory's information. Hopefully, this study will demonstrate the insights that become possible once the thematic content of Gregory's works is properly understood, and once the women in his works are given the dedicated attention of an in-depth study.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB — *Analecta Bollandiana*

After Rome — *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History. Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. by Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998)

CCSL – *Corpus Christianorum series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-)

Clovis — *Clovis, histoire et mémoire: Clovis et son temps, l'événement*, ed. by Michel Rouche, 2 vols (Paris: University of Paris - Sorbonne, 1997)

CSEL – *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866-)

CSR — Gregory of Tours, *De cursu stellarum ratio, qualiter ad officium implendum debeat observari*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

EHR — *English Historical Review*

EME — *Early Medieval Europe*

Études franques — Godefroid Kurth, *Études franques*, 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion; and Brussels: Albert Dewitt, 1919)

Fortunatus, *Carmina* — Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, ed. by Frederic Leo, *MGH AA*, 4.1 (Berlin, 1881)

Fredegar — *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888)

GC — Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

GM — Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

GoT — *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. by Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002)

Herrschaft — *Herrschaft und Kirche: Beiträge zur Entstehung und Wirkungsweise episkopaler und monastischer Organisationsformen. Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 33, ed. by Friedrich Prinz (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersmann, 1988)

Hist. — Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *MGH SRM*, 1.1 (Hannover, 1951)

HZ — *Historische Zeitschrift*

LHF — *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2

Long-Haired Kings — Wallace-Hadrill, J.M., *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen, 1962)

MA — Gregory of Tours (?), *Liber de miraculis beati Andreae apostoli*, ed. by Max Bonnet, *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

MGH AA — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores antiquissimi*

MGH Epistolae — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*

MGH SRM — *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*

MIÖG — *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreiche Geschichtsforschung*

NA — *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*

Pardessus, *Diplomata* — *Diplomata, chartae, epistolae, leges ad res Gallo-Francicas spectantia,* ed. by Jean Marie Pardessus, 2 vols (Paris, 1843-1849)

PL — *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina,* ed. by Jacques Paul Migne, 161 vols (Paris, 1841-1866)

RBPH — *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*

RHÉF — *Revue de l'histoire de l'église de France*

Rome's Fall — Walter Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989)

SD — Gregory of Tours, *Passio sanctorum septem dormientium apud Ephesum,* ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM,* 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

Society — Brown, Peter, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)

VJ — Gregory of Tours, *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris,* ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM,* 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

VM — Gregory of Tours, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini,* ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM,* 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

VP — Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum,* ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM,* 1.2 (Hannover, 1885)

ZSR GA — *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Germanische Abteilung*

ZSR KA — *Zeitschrift der Savignystiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung*

INTRODUCTION

Gregory of Tours has always been an important figure in studies on the Early Medieval West. As scholarship has become interested in an increasing number of topics, his prolific corpus of writings has continued to provide new opportunities for investigation. And, although Gregory's historical significance will always be tied to these works, even if he had written nothing, he would still be known to scholars as a politically important and well-connected bishop. Any attempt to use Gregory's works, therefore, must begin with a thorough understanding of the bishop himself, and his individuality as an author. As scholarship over the past quarter century has shown, this is no easy task. Indeed, few other medieval historians have proved to be as difficult to truly understand as Gregory. He possessed the gift of appearing to be more straightforward than he really was, and his clever narrative has enchanted more than a few scholars into accepting his interpretation of events without sufficient reservation. Certain exceptions notwithstanding, there is still a tendency, especially in studies of medieval women, to mine Gregory's writings for information without the requisite critical judgement. Before Gregory's corpus can be used as a source for the reconstruction of the history of queens, princesses, nuns, mothers, aristocrats, holy women, etc., Gregory's opinions about particular women, and the literary techniques that he employed in expressing these opinions, must be subjected to a detailed analysis.

There have been a number of different interpretations of Gregory as an author advanced over the years. Giselle de Nie focused on his use of metaphor, and the poetic nature of his miracle stories, in order to show that he both accepted and helped to create a thoroughly spiritualised interpretation of experience.[1] Walter Goffart also analysed the manner in which Gregory saw the miraculous as a normal part of the world – a world that itself depended on God's creative agency for its sustained existence. But Goffart concentrated more on the political aspects of Gregory's works, and, in particular, his use of satire to demonstrate the ultimate futility of secular

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[1] Giselle de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987).

pursuits.[2] Gregory's relationship with both the powers of this world, and the powers of the world to come, were put into a more precise context by Ian Wood. When it came to writing about kings, the well-connected Gregory could be something of a Gallic Procopius.[3] Similarly, when it came to writing about saints, Gregory was keen to promote those holy dead who had an association with his family and the familial estates.[4] Wood also stressed Gregory's individuality and his cleverness as an author, which together present a challenge to anyone attempting to use his writings as a source for historical reconstructions of Gallic society in general.[5] These points, however, were not intended to question Gregory's genuineness of belief or adherence to moral principle – two qualities made particularly apparent in the work of Raymond Van Dam, who, above all, demonstrated what it meant to be an *alumnus* of the saints, and how Gregory put this into practice.[6] Lastly, Martin Heinzelmann placed special emphasis on Gregory's role as a bishop, which simultaneously made him both a pastor and a politician, in order to better understand the structure and form of his historical prose.[7]

Each of these interpretations attributed a somewhat different set of qualities to Gregory. While it certainly seems possible to harmonise them, no one has yet done so by reconciling their differences in a study dedicated to the task. In the absence of this, it seems prudent to take their basic commonalities as a point of departure. Collectively, they have demonstrated convincingly that the old view of Gregory as a rather simple

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[2] Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[3] Ian Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *RBPH*, 71 (1993), 253-270.

[4] Ian Wood, 'Topographies of Holy Power in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Mayke de Jong et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 137-154; id., *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor: Headstart History, 1994); id., 'The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. by Patrick Wormald et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 34-57.

[5] Ian Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', in *GoT*, pp. 29-46; id., 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *RBPH*, 63 (1985), 249-272.

[6] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The topic of the *alumnus* is mentioned on pp. 52-68, 91-93. See also Wood, 'Individuality', p. 34; id., *Gregory*, pp. 4-5; Kathleen Mitchell, 'Saints and Public Christianity in the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours', in *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Controni (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1987), pp. 77-94; and John Corbett, 'The Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Medieval History*, 7 (1981), 1-13.

[7] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours (538-594), „Zehn Bücher Geschichte": Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

and naïve chronicler of events must be rejected in favour of the view that Gregory subjected his material to a sophisticated interpretation based on his opinions, interests, and values.[8] Moreover, they have each called attention to the various literary strategies that Gregory used to subtly communicate his points, a topic first addressed in detail in the pioneering work of Felix Thürlemann, who demonstrated the manner in which Gregory used reported speech to express ideas that were in fact his own.[9] One might naturally expect this to occur in the passages where Gregory appears as a character in his own works, but, as Guy Halsall has recently shown, these passages are often the most difficult to use as evidence for Gregory's actual thoughts and deeds.[10] A more profitable approach must take a full account of Gregory's relationships with his contemporaries, which can sometimes be augmented by other sources, and then proceed to an analysis of the way that these individuals were presented in accordance with the thematic content of Gregory's writings. For example, it is sometimes possible to get a better picture of one of Gregory's subjects by attending to what he chose not to say, rather than by examining what he did say.

Numerous women whom Gregory knew personally appear in his works. Some of these came from his own family. His mother, Armentaria, features on several occasions in his hagiography, and he also made mention of his niece, Justina, as well as his sister, who remained unnamed. Gregory had dealings with several royal women, particularly the famous queens Brunhild and Fredegund. As will become clear later in this study, Brunhild was something of a patroness for Gregory, while Fredegund had a much more antagonistic relationship with the bishop. Indeed, at one point Gregory was put on trial for allegedly slandering her. Such dramatic occurrences ought not to overshadow Gregory's relationships with other queens, such as Ingoberg, whose last will and testament he helped to draft. Another royal with whom Gregory worked,

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[8] For a historiography of scholarship on Gregory concentrating on the issue of naïveté, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 1-5; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 114-119; de Nie, *Views*, pp. 1-26; and Adriaan Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul: The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in their Historical Context* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1994), pp. 13-21.

[9] Felix Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours: Topoi und Wirklichkeit*. (Bern: Lang, 1974).

[10] Guy Halsall, 'Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writing of History', in *GoT*, pp. 337-350; and id., 'The Preface to Book V to Gregory of Tours' Histories: Its Form, Context and Significance', *EHR*, 122 (2007), 297-317.

Radegund, was also the foundress of the monastery of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers, and Gregory was closely connected to this institution. Gregory likewise had connections with several religious women. He endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to resolve a dispute between Ingitrude and her daughter, Berthegund, who were both nuns in his diocesan capital of Tours. And he became involved in a dispute in Poitiers when forty disgruntled nuns left the city seeking momentary shelter in Tours.

Tours was a city with a legacy that included important holy women. Monegund had founded a religious community in there, and had developed a reputation for sanctity. Similarly, Queen Chlothild had spent many of the years of her long widowhood in the city prior to her death in 544. Both Monegund and Chlothild left a legacy in the city, which Gregory incorporated into his works. Gregory naturally also dealt with the female members of his congregation in his pastoral capacity, and they appear often in his works, especially in his hagiography. Indeed, Gregory felt a responsibility to care for the souls of his flock that in many ways shaped his writings to a greater extent than any political considerations. Lastly, one must note the importance that the Blessed Virgin Mary had for Gregory, not merely as a biblical figure, but as a present source of intercession, especially since he carried a reliquary with him that contained her relics, among others.

Gregory was a well-connected individual. Born into a distinguished family, with estates and influence throughout the Auvergne and beyond, Gregory spent much of his youth in the ecclesiastical circles of Clermont and Lyon, where his relatives served as bishops.[11] When Gregory himself became Bishop of Tours in 573, it was by the royal appointment of King Sigibert, his wife Brunhild, and the assistance of the former queen, Radegund.[12] Thereafter, Gregory was enmeshed in the vicissitudes of Merovingian politics – 'up to his neck', in the words of Guy Halsall.[13] Merovingian Gaul was a complex political entity, with three kingdoms (Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy) based more on centres of power and dependant cities than on clear-cut

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[11] See Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 7-21 (on Gregory's relatives), and pp. 26-31 (on his upbringing). On Gregory's youth, see also Margarete Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit nach den Werken Gregors von Tours*, 2 vols (Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 1982), I, 205-207.

[12] Venantius Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, ed. by Frederic Leo, *MGH AA*, 4.1 (Berlin, 1881), *Carmina*, 5.3.

[13] Halsall, 'Nero', p. 346.

territorial boundaries. Gregory knew well the burdens that involvement in secular affairs brought, and this may have inspired the discernable longing to live *in contemptu mundi* that haunts his works. Gregory's *civitas* of Tours held a prominent position in Gaul, even if it was not among the largest of cities. It was located on a major crossing of the Loire, which served as a point of access for Aquitaine – a territory divided equally, in theory, amongst the various Merovingian kings.[14] Tours was also a metropolitan see, overseeing a number of dioceses located in different political domains.[15] The city drew much of its clout, not to mention its income, from the cult of St. Martin, whose shrine lay within its vicinity.[16] Gregory himself drew much of his personal strength from his relationship with the saint, and he was keen to emphasise Martin's intercessory powers in his works, though, admittedly, he wrote about a great many saints and their miracles.[17]

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[14] Wood, 'Individuality', p. 33. On the importance of the Loire in particular, see Louis West, *Roman Gaul: The Objects of Trade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1935), pp. 13-14. On Aquitaine, see Eugen Ewig, 'L'Aquitaine et les pays rhénans au Moyen Âge', reprinted in *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, ed. by Hartmut Atsma, 2 vols (Munich: Artemis, 1976-1979), I, 553-572; and Michel Rouche, *L'Aquitaine, des Wisigoths aux Arabes, 418-781: Naissance d'une région* (Paris: Editions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1979).

[15] On Gregory's metropolitan authority, see Luce Pietri, *La ville de Tours du IVe au VIe siècle: Naissance d'une cité chrétienne*, (Rome: École française de Rome, 1983), pp. 293-302. In theory a hierarchy existed within the metropolitan sees, although its precise nature was debated, see Louis Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Paris: Thorin, 1894-1915), I, 84-144.

[16] The significance of Martin's cult for Tours is discussed in Wood, 'Individuality, pp. 35-36; id., 'Topographies'; and Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 11-28, 69-81. On St. Martin in general, see Sharon Farmer, *Communities of St. Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); John Corbett, 'Changing Perceptions in Late Antiquity: Martin of Tours', *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 3 (1987), 236-251; Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 119-140, 157-176; Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 36-87; Jacques Fontaine, 'Sulpice Sévère a-t-il travesti saint Martin de Tours en martyr militaire?', *AB*, 81 (1963), 31-58; id., 'Un clé littéraire de la *Vita Martini* de Sulpice Sévère: la typologie prophetique', in *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1963), pp. 84-95; id., 'Hagiographie et politique, de Sulpice Sévère à Venance Fortunat', *RHÉF*, 62 (1967), 113-140; Élie Griffe, 'Saint Martin et le monachisme gaulois', in *Saint Martin et son temps: Mémorial du XVIe centenaire des débuts du monachisme en Gaule, 361-1961.* (Rome: Herder, 1961), pp. 3-24; and Hippolyte Delehaye, 'Saint Martin et Sulpice Sévère', *AB*, 38 (1920), 5-136.

[17] On relics and the cult of the saints, see Alan Thacker , 'Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Richard Sharpe and Alan Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-44; id., 'The Making of a Local Saint', in ibid., pp. 45-74; Richard Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain', in ibid., pp. 75-154; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France: Local Saints and Churches in Burgundy and the Auvergne 400-1000', in ibid., pp. 155-188; Martin

Gregory's literary corpus represents a monumental achievement. His most famous work is undoubtedly his *Decem libri historiarum*, or simply the *Historiae* (Hist.), which he began shortly after taking office in Tours in 573, and which he continued writing and editing over the next two decades of his life.[18] Gregory distinguished this work from his hagiography, which he called *miracula*. This included his book on St. Julian (VJ), his works on confessor and martyr saints (GC and GM), as well his composition on St. Martin (VM), with which he began his career as an author. To this list may be added Gregory's collection of the lives of twenty saints (VP), and a rendering into Latin of an account of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (SD). He probably also deserves credit for a compilation of apocryphal information on Andrew the Apostle, which has survived without explicit attribution (MA). Gregory also composed an astronomical treatise on the calculation of the monastic hours, prefaced with a

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Heinzelmann, 'Die Funktion des Wunders in der spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Historiographie', in *Mirakel im Mittelalter: Konzeptionen, Erscheinungsformen, Deutungen*, ed. by id. et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), pp. 23-61; id. *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979); John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of the Saints in the Early Christian West c. 300-1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); de Nie, 'Fatherly and Motherly Curing in Sixth-Century Gaul: Saint Radegund's *Mysterium*', in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* ed. by Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 53-86; Paul Hayward, 'Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom', in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by id. and James Howard-Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 115-142; Cynthia Hahn, 'Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early-Medieval Saints' Shrines', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 1079-1106; Hanz-Werner Goetz, 'Heiligenkult und Geschlecht: Geschlechts-spezifisches Wunderwirken in frühmittelalterlichen Mirakelberichten?', *Das Mittelalter*, 1 (1996), 89-111; Arnold Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquen. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Nikol Verlagsges, 1994); Luce Pietri, 'Culte des saints et religiosité politique dans la Gaule du Ve et du VIe siècle', in *Les Fonctions des saints dans le monde occidental (IIIe-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris: De Boccard, 1991), pp. 354-369; Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 86-100; David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); id., *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (London: SCM, 1981), id., 'Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of Ways', reprinted in *Society*, pp. 166-195; id., 'Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', reprinted in ibid., pp. 222-250; id., 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', reprinted in ibid., pp. 103-152; John Corbett, 'Praesentium signorum munera: The Cult of the Saints in the World of Gregory of Tours', *Florilegium*, 5 (1983), 44-61; Yvette Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae: Le Culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Roma: École française de Rome, 1982); Jacques Fontaine, 'Le culte des saints et ses implications sociologique. Réflexions sur un récent essai de Peter Brown', *AB*, 100 (1982), 17-42; Nicole Herrmann-Mascard, *Les Reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975); and Werner Jacobsen, 'Saints' Tombs in Frankish Church Architecture', *Speculum*, 72 (1977), 1107-1143.

[18] The chronology of the *Historiae* is discussed in Chapter IV.

unique account of seven wonders of the world (CSR), as well as a commentary on the Psalms, which has survived only in a few fragments.

It is possible to make some insights into Gregory's intended audience for these works. Their thematic content suggests a broad audience, since Gregory discussed an array of topics relevant to secular and ecclesiastical elites, as well as lower status individuals. His field of vision centred on Gaul and, when it extended further, it gazed toward the greater Mediterranean world, rather than the pagan hinterlands to the north.[19] Considering that Latin remained the vernacular language of sixth-century Gaul, it is probable that Gregory's hagiographic works were intended to be read in a liturgical context, and probably other circumstances as well.[20] Gregory's *Historiae* have been seen as directed at a similar audience, one consisting largely of ecclesiastics, religious, and pious laymen – especially pilgrims to St. Martin's church at Tours.[21] Although this might suggest that the royal courts, and other aristocratic circles, were not foremost on Gregory's mind, one must recall the close relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies that existed in Merovingian Gaul.[22] Any attempt to reach a clerical audience necessarily included the great royal and upper class families of the region, since this segment of society staffed the Merovingian church

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[19] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 138; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 186-255.

[20] On Latin as the vernacular language of Gaul, see Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 480-751: Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 21-30. On the liturgical use of hagiography, see Marc Van Uytfanghe, 'L'Audience de l'hagiographie au VIe siècle en Gaule', in *Scribere Sanctorum Gesta*, ed. by Étienne Renard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 157-177; id., 'L'Hagiographie et son public à l'époque mérovingienne', *Studia Patristica*, 16 (1985), 54-62; Baudouin de Gaiffier, 'La Lecture des actes des martyrs dans la prière liturgique en Occident', *AB*, 72 (1954), 134-166; and Katrien Heene, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Hagiography: Continuity or Change in Public and Aims?', *AB*, 107 (1989), 415-428. On the view that hagiography enjoyed more limited circulation, see Martin Heinzelmann, 'Neue Aspekte der biographischen und hagiographischen Literatur in der lateinischen Welt (1.-6. Jahrhundert)', *Francia*, 1 (1973), 27-44.

[21] Breukelaar, *Historiography*, p. 124; and John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours in the Light of Modern Research', reprinted in *Long-Haired Kings*, pp. 49-70 (at p. 69). See also Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 98-101 and nn. 42-43.

[22] On the relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies, see Ralph Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 89-104; Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 123-135; Van Dam, *Leadership*, pp. 203-212; Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500-1000* (London : Macmillan, 1982), pp. 49-63; Martin Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien. Zur Kontinuität römischer Führungsschichten vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Soziale, prosopographische und bildungsgeschichtliche Aspekte.* (Munich: Artemis, 1976); and Louis Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne de l'Église*, 4 vols (Paris: De Boccard, 1925), IV, 524.

with most of its personnel. On the one hand, this acted as a hindrance to Gregory, since he had to treat sensitive political information carefully, but, on the other hand, it served as an opportunity, since he could give a political commentary in his works, as long as he employed subtlety and maintained discretion.

In response to this challenge, Gregory drew upon an array of literary techniques in order to communicate his themes to his audience without incurring the repercussions that he would have suffered otherwise. In particular, Gregory was a master of ambiguity, which he used both to absolve his protagonists of unsavoury details, and to incriminate his antagonists by the innuendo of conspicuous silence. Another strategy that Gregory preferred was indirect comparison. Rather than expressly praise or rebuke certain individuals, Gregory carefully paralleled them with someone else of whom he could speak more openly. This resulted in juxtapositions within the narrative, and thematic analogy. It also means that Gregory's occasional bluntness merits more than a straightforward interpretation. As a matter of methodology, it is important to attend to Gregory's literary strategies before a historical reconstruction of his subjects is undertaken. This also requires an identification of Gregory's themes, which run throughout the entirety of his works. Once Gregory's interpretation of events has been accounted for, it becomes possible not only to offer a more historically reliable evaluation of his subjects, but also to determine the extent to which he can be taken as representative of broader opinions with sixth-century Gaul. Although Gregory's individuality retains its abiding quality, he can often be identified with a larger group, be it a majority or a minority, regarding particular issues.

Fortunately, Merovingian Gaul produced a relative abundance of sources available to the historian. Besides Gregory's *Historiae*, there are two narrative sources for the period. First, there is the *Chronicae* that were once thought to have been the work of an otherwise unknown individual named Fredegar, but which may in fact have been the work of several people.[23] This uncertainty of authorship makes it difficult to evaluate and utilise the text. Although part of the *Chronicae* may have been

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[23] The four-book division found in the edition of Bruno Krusch has been retained, even though the author(s) of the *Chronicae* never intended it to be divided as such; see Roger Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007), pp. 82-83; and id., *Fredegar* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1996), pp. 73-139 (at p. 88).

composed in the 610s, it is not an especially reliable text, and most of it was written in the later half of the seventh century at the earliest.[24] Nonetheless, the *Chronicae* are important because they used Gregory's *Historiae* as a source, because they added some unique information, and because they gave a rather different interpretation of events. In so far as this study is concerned, the *Chronicae* will be regarded simply as expressing the views of the final author, who will be called Fredegar as a matter of convention.

The second narrative source, the *Liber historiae Francorum* (LHF), is also anonymous, and it dates to c. 727.[25] Like the *Chronicae* of Fredegar, the LHF is

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[24] The historiography and *status quaestionis* regarding the authorship of the text can be found in Collins, *Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 16-25. Collins did not resolve the question regarding the number of authors, although he saw the final form of the text as a Neustrian-Burgundian production of c. 660. Bruno Krusch had argued that the *Chronicae* had been composed by three authors writing c. 613, 642, and 660; see his 'Die Chronicae des sogenannten Fredegar', *NA*, 7 (1882), 247-351, 421-516; and id., 'Fredegarius Scholasticus – Oudarius? Neue Beiträge zur Fredegar Kritik', *Nachrichten des Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 2 (1926), 237-263. This view was followed, in modified form, by Louis Halphen, 'Une théorie récente sur la Chronique de pseudo-Frédégaire', *Revue historique*, 79 (1902), 41-56; and Gustav Schnürer, *Die Verfasser der sogenannten Fredegar-Chronik*. Collectanea Friburgensia, 9 (Freiburg: Commissionsverlag der Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1900). In a similar spirit, the case for two authors, writing c. 614 and 660 was made by Sigmund Hellmann, 'Das Fredegar-Problem', *Historische Vierteiljahresschrift*, 29 (1935), 36-92. Hellmann's arguments were based largely on a linguistic analysis, which found an opponent in Alvar Erikson, 'The Problem of the Authorship in the Chronicle of Fredegar', *Eranos*, 63 (1965), 47-76. Lastly one may add the observations made in favour of multiple authors by Richard Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 14, who pointed out that the *Chronicae* seem to contain two different accounts of the origin of the Franks. The idea that the *Chronicae* were written by only one author was advanced by Léon Levillain, 'Review of Bruno Krusch, 'Fredegarius scholasticus – Oudarius', *Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes*, 99 (1928), 89-95; Marcel Baudot, 'La question de pseudo-Frédégaire', *Le Moyen Âge*, 29 (1928), 129-170; Ferdinand Lot, 'Encore la Chronique du pseudo-Frédégaire', *Revue historique*, 115 (1914), 305-337; and Gabriel Monod, 'Du lieu d'origine de la chronique dite de Frédégaire', *Jahrbuch für Schweizerische Geschichte*, 3 (1878), 139-163. Although Lot had been willing to allow for two phases of writing, 642 and 660, this was dispensed with by Levillain, who argued that the *Chronicae* were composed in one phase c. 658-661. The same conclusion was reached by Walter Goffart, 'The Fredegar Problem Reconsidered', reprinted in *Rome's Fall*, pp. 319-354. At a minimum, one can conclude from the different hypotheses that the text was written by no more than four individuals at some time between the year of its last mentioned event, 659, to the date of the oldest manuscript, 714.

[25] On the identity of the author, see Gerberding, *Rise*, pp. 146-159; Janet Nelson, 'Gender and Genre in Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages', *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Genet (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991), pp. 149-163 (at. pp. 160-161); and Ian Wood, 'Administration, Law and Culture in Merovingian Gaul', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 63-81 (at. p. 78, n. 107). See also Rosamond McKitterick, 'Akkulturation and the Writing of History in the Early Middle Ages', in *Akkulturation. Probleme einer germanisch-romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter*, ed. by Dieter Hägermann et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 381-395 (at pp. 384-388).

dependent on Gregory's *Historiae* for most of its information on the sixth-century, although it also provides some unique material. Since much of this is of dubious historicity, the LHF's value rests mainly in its interpretation of events, which may be used to put Gregory's version into relief by comparison. Though these are the only narrative histories of Gaul for the Merovingian period, the histories of different kingdoms, such as Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, are of limited use.[26] Byzantine histories also discuss topics that feature in Gregory's works on occasion. Additionally, there are the *Chronica* of Marius of Avenches, which, though only a set of annals, mention certain events in Gaul during the first half of the century.[27] Likewise, Gregory's references to affairs in Spain can be compared to the *Chronicon* of John of Biclaro, as well as the *Historia Gothorum* by Isidore of Seville.[28] These works, however, are most useful in evaluating Gregory's *Historiae* alone, rather than his entire corpus, and even then they only apply to a modest portion of this text.

Gregory's extensive collection of hagiographical works can be compared to an abundance of Merovingian hagiography. For example, two different *vitae* were produced regarding Radegund, which can be used to illuminate Gregory's information on the saint.[29] The first *vita* was written by Gregory's friend and associate, Venantius Fortunatus, who also left an extensive corpus of poetic and prose works to draw upon.[30] Likewise, Jonas of Bobbio's account of Columbanus contains a large amount of information on Queen Brunhild, which is of a very different tone from that found in

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[26] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. by Ludwig Berthmann and Georg Waitz, *MGH scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum* (Hannover, 1878).

[27] Marius of Avenches, *Chronica a. cccclv – dlxxxi*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *MGH AA*, 11 (Berlin, 1894).

[28] John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, ed. by Julio Campos, *Juan De Biclaro* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1960); Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *Isidori Iunioris episcopi Hispalensis historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum, MGH AA*, 11 (Berlin, 1894).

[29] Venantius Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888); Baudonivia, *De vita sanctae Radegundis* (2), ibid.

[30] On Fortunatus, see Brian Brennan, 'Venantius Fortunatus: Byzantine Agent?', *Byzantion*, 65 (1995), 7-16; id., 'The Career of Venantius Fortunatus', *Traditio*, 41 (1985), 49-78; Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Dominique Tardi, *Fortunat: Étude sur un dernier représentant de la poésie latine dans le Gaule mérovingienne* (Paris: Boivin, 1927); Richard Koebner, *Venantius Fortunatus: Seine Persönlichkeit und seine Stellung in der geistigen Kultur des Merowingerreiches* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1915); and Wilhelm Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus* (Berlin: Weidmannschei, 1901).

Gregory's *Historiae*.[31] Hagiographical sources present a number of methodological

challenges, but their usefulness for reconstructing Merovingian history was

demonstrated convincingly in the work of Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding.[32]

Moreover, the distinction between historical and hagiographical sources, as a matter of

genre, is itself somewhat artificial.[33] Gregory, of course, made a distinction between his

Historiae and the works he called *miracula*, but this cannot serve as justification for

current scholarly categories of genre insofar as numerous passages within the *Historiae*

fit the technical criteria of hagiography.[34]

To these narrative sources may be added other texts of a more documentary

nature. The *Codex Theodosianus, Pactus legis Salicae, Liber constitutionum sive lex

Gundobada,* and the *Lex Romana Burgundionum* were all legal texts known in sixth-

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[31] Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius libri duo*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 4 (Hannover, 1902). On Jonas's work, see Ian Wood, 'Jonas, the Merovingians, and Pope Honorius: Diplomata and the Vita Columbani', in *After Rome*, pp. 99-120'; id., 'The Vita Columbani and Merovingian Hagiography', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 63-80; and id., *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 31-39.

[32] Paul Fouracre, and Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography 640-720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). On Merovingian hagiography, see also Isabelle Réal, *Vie des saints, vie de famille: Représentation et système de la parenté dans le Royaume mérovingien (481-751) d'après les sources hagiographiques* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Paul Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990), 3-38; Ian Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian Hagiography', in *Fälschung im Mittelalter: Fingierte Briefe Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen* (Hannover: Hahnische Buchhandlung, 1988), pp. 369-384; Friedrich Prinz, 'Heiligenkult und Adelsherrschaft im Spiegel merowingischer Hagiographie', *HZ*, 204 (1967), 529-544; František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* (Prague: Nakladatelství Ceskoslovenské Akademie, 1965). More generally, see Friedrich Prinz, 'Hagiographische Texte über Kult- und Wallfahrtsorte: Auftragsarbeit für kultpropaganda, persönliche Motivation, Rolle der Mönche', *Hagiographica*, 1 (1994), 17-42; Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Martin Heinzelmann, 'Une source de base de la littérature hagiographique latine: le recueil de miracles', in *Hagiographie, culture et sociétés IVe-XIIe siècle* (Paris: Université de Paris, 1981), pp. 235-259; Friedrich Lotter, 'Methodisches zur Gewinnung historischer Erkenntnisse aus hagiographischen Quellen', *HZ*, 229 (1979), 298-356; Baudouin de Gaiffier, 'Hagiographie et historiographie: Quelques aspects du problème', *La storiografia altomedievale* (1970), pp. 139-66; René Aigrain, *L'Hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1953); and Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Légendes hagiographiques*, 3rd edn (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1927).

[33] The utility of the categories themselves was called into question by Felice Lifshitz, 'Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts and Historical Narrative', *Viator*, 25 (1994), 95-115.

[34] Content, rather than form or function, remains the underlying issue concerning the problems of the scholarly category of 'hagiography'; see Anne-Marie Helvétius, 'Les Saints et l'histoire: L'Apport de l'hagiologie à la médiévistique d'aujourd'hui', in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. by Hanz-Werner Goetz (Bochum: Winkler, 2000), pp. 135-163.

century Gaul.[35] Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish their jurisdiction and use, but one may at least say in the abstract that Merovingian society was interested in these legal sources for a reason, and this has potential value for the historian.[36] Of more certain application are the *diplomata* and *capitularia* produced by the royal government.[37] Merovingian church councils also produced legal texts governing ecclesiastical matters, and Gregory referred to these decrees on a fairly regular basis, which makes them a far more useful set of texts for the purposes of this study.[38]

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[35] *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, P. M. Meyer, and P. Krüger, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus sirmondianis et leges novellae ed Theodosianum pertinentes*, 3 vols (Berlin, 1905); *Pactus legis Salicae*, ed. by Karl August Eckhardt, *MGH Leges*, 4 (Hannover, 1962); *Liber constitutionum sive lex Gundobada*, ed. by Ludwig Rudolf de Salis, *MGH Leges nationum Germanicarum*, 2.1 (Hannover, 1892); *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, ed. by George Heinrich Pertz, *MGH Leges*, 3 (Hannover, 1863). Also of use is the *Lex Ribuaria*, ed. by F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, *MGH Leges*, 3 (Hannover, 1863), which is probably best dated to the seventh century.

[36] On women in the codes, see Kirsten Nath, *Das Frauenbild im Spiegel des Pactus legis Salicae. Eine Untersuchung über den Wert der Frau in den Gesetzen der Merowinger* (Hamburg: Verlag für akademische Texte, 2005); Antti Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Gabriele Von Olberg, 'Aspekte der rechtlich-sozialen Stellung der Frauen in den frühmittelalterlichen Leges', in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, ed. by Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 221-235; Ruth Schmidt-Wiegard, 'Der Lebenskreis der Frau im Spiegel der volkssprachigen Bezeichungen der Leges barbarorum', in ibid., pp. 195-209; and François-Louis Ganshof, 'Le statut de la femme dans la monarchie franque', *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin*, 12 (1962), 5-58. On the debt the barbarian codes owed to Roman law, see Peter Heather, 'Law and Identity in the Burgundian Kingdom', in *The Burgundians: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by Giorgio Ausenda et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009); Antti Arjava, 'The Survival of Roman Family Law after the Barbarian Settlements', in *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Ralph Mathisen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 33-51 (at pp. 34-35); Ian Wood, 'The Code in Merovingian Gaul', in *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, ed. by id. and Jill Harris (London: Duckworth, 1993), pp. 161-177 (at pp. 163-164); Patrick Amory, 'The Meaning and Purpose of Ethnic Terminology in the Burgundian Laws', *EME*, 2 (1993), 1-28 (at pp. 6, 15-19); Paul King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

[37] *Capitularia merowingica*, ed. by Alfred Boretius, *MGH capitularia regnum Francorum*, 1.1 (Hannover, 1883); Pardessus, *Diplomata*.

[38] *Concilia Galliae*, ed. by Charles Munier, 2 vols, *CCSL*, 148-148A. The terms 'synod' and 'council' are used synonymously in this study, as they probably always were; see Adolf Lumpe, 'Zur Geschichte der Wörter *Concilium* und *Synodus* in der antiken christlichen Latinität', *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum*, 2 (1970), 1-21. On Merovingian church councils, see Gregory Halford, *Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511-768* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Odette Pontal, *Die Synoden im Merowingerreich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1986); Carlo De Clercq, *La Législation religieuse franque: Étude sur les actes de conciles et les capitulaires, les statuts diocésains et les règles monastiques*, 2 vols (Louvain: Bureau du Recueil, Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1936-1958); Hans Barion, *Das fränkisch- deutsche Synodalrecht des Frühmittelalters* (Bonn: L. Röhrscheid, 1931); Rudolph Sohm, *Kirchenrecht*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Dunckner and Humblot, 1892-1923); Heinrich Brunner, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1887-92); Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*, 5 vols (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1887-1954); Edgar Loening,

Moreover, though it is typical to think of secular and ecclesiastical legislation as pertaining to different spheres, the two cannot be regarded as especially different considering that church councils were convoked through the permission of the king, who probably had a say in their decrees.[39] Likewise, royal legislation clearly drew upon canonical promulgations, and it often covered topics of religious orientation.[40] After all, Merovingian kingship itself was deeply indebted to religious and biblical thought for its theoretical justification.[41] Finally, a relatively large collection of epistolary correspondence from the sixth-century has survived, which serves as an invaluable resource for ascertaining Gregory's information, and especially his strategic silences.[42]

These sources have served as the basis for several studies on women during the Merovingian period. While, until now, there has not been a dedicated study specifically on Gregory's representation of women in his works, there is a range of scholarship on related matters, which has been of profit for the present study.[43] The groundbreaking work of Suzanne Fonay Wemple, Jo Ann McNamara, and Pauline Stafford in the early 1980s made great strides in establishing the position of women in

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Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenrechts, 2 vols (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1878); and Richard Weyl, *Das fränkische Staatskirchenrecht zur Zeit der Merowinger* (Breslau: Wilhelm Koebner, 1888).

[39] On royal involvement in church councils, see Halford, *Archaeology*, pp. 21-22, 57-59; Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (New York: Longman, 1994), p. 106; id., 'Incest, Law, and the Bible in Sixth-Century Gaul', *EME*, 7 (1998), 291-303 (at pp. 293-294); Barion, *Synodalrecht*, pp. 233-252; De Clercq, *Legislation*, I, 99-104; Duchesne, *Histoire*, IV, 528; and Paul Hinschius, *System des katholischen Kirchenrechts mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Deutschland*, 6 vols (Berlin: Guttentag, 1869-1897), III, 542-543. The interpretations differ concerning the degree, but all admit royal influence.

[40] Karl Voigt, *Staat und Kirche von Konstantin dem Grossen bis zum Ende der Karolingerzeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936), pp. 250-254.

[41] See Yitzhak Hen, 'The Uses of the Bible and the Perception of Kingship in Merovingian Gaul', in *EME*, 7 (1998), 277-289.

[42] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH Epistolae*, 3.3 (Berlin, 1892); *Epistolae aevi Merovingici collectae*, ibid., 3.7; *Epistolae Wisigoticae*, ibid., 3.9.

[43] There have been, however, a few surveys that serve as preliminary investigations into Gregory's systematic representation of women in his works: Werner Affeldt and Sabine Reiter, 'Die Historiae Gregors von Tours als Quelle für die Lebenssituation von Frauen im Frankenreich des sechsten Jahrhunderts', in *Frauen in der Geschichte VII: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Geschichte der Frauen im Frühmittelalter: Methoden – Probleme – Ergebnisse*, ed. by Werner Affeldt and Annette Kuhn (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1986), pp. 192-208; Brigitte Merta, 'Helena comparanda regina – secunda Isebel. Darstellungen von Frauen des merowingischen Königshauses in frühmittelanterlichen Quellen', *MIÖG*, 96 (1988), 1-32; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 120-139.

Merovingian society and politics.[44] This topic has featured in subsequent works, and also in broader surveys of women in the Early Medieval period, which date back to the work of Linda Eckenstein in 1896.[45] Furthermore, specific women such as Brunhild and Radegund have served as individual topics of interest, and studies focusing on their careers have had to engage in Gregory's literary representation of them in particular. In spite of this attention, the works focusing on Gregory as an author have rarely taken sufficient account of his themes regarding certain important women. For example, the otherwise penetrating analysis of Adriaan H. B. Breukelaar fails to recognise the degree of influence that particular women had in the bishop's life.[46] Even the thorough and deservedly praised study of the *Historiae* by Martin Heinzelmann made rather little mention of Gregory's thematic content regarding important women, and subsequent scholarship has consequently followed suit.[47] This is, of course, not intended as a criticism so much as an observation of an opportunity to build upon earlier, invaluable contributions to the field.

Any work on the Merovingian period faces certain technical choices. Certain titles for offices within the governmental administration of Gaul, for example, can be difficult to translate. Although titles such as *rex* and *episcopus* can be rendered as 'king'

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[44] Jo Ann McNamara, 'Women and Power through the Family Revisited', in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 17-30; Wemple, Suzanne Fonay, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1983).

[45] Claire Thiellet, *Femmes, Reines et Saintes (Ve-XIe siècle)* (Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004); Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne: de l'honneur et des femmes aux premiers temps mérovingiens* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2001); Bernhard Jussen, *Der Name der Witwe. Erkundungen zur Semantik der mittelalterlichen Bußkultur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2000); Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Hanz-Werner Goetz, *Frauen im Frühen Mittelalter: Frauenbild und Frauenleben im Frankenreich* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1995); Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (viie-xe siècle): essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1995); Susanne Wittern, *Frauen, Heiligkeit und Macht. Lateinishe Frauenviten aus dem 4. bis 7. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994); Edith Ennen, *Frauen im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1986); Marie-Louise Portmann, *Die Darstellung der Frau in der Geschichtschreibung des früheren Mittelalters* (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1958), pp. 38-44; Linda Eckenstein, *Women Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Loire and Convent Life between AD 500 and AD 1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896).

[46] Breukelaar, *Historiography.*

[47] Heinzelmann, *Gregor.* See also the summary of Gregory's themes given by Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 91-122.

and 'bishop' without difficulty, the same cannot be said of *dux, comes*, etc., and in these

instances the Latin term has been retained, in the interests of precision.[48] Ethnic

terminology presents a more complicated problem.[49] In this study, the term

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[48] On the office of *dux* and *comes*, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte,* I, 25-33, 63-67; Archibald Lewis, 'The Dukes of the Regnum Francorum, A. D. 550-751', *Speculum,* 51 (1976), 381-410; Karin Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie der merowingischen Amtsträger in der Zeit von 511-613* (Bonn, 1974), pp. 20-32; Rolf Sprandel, 'Bemerkung zum frühfränkischen Comitat', *ZSR GA,* 82 (1965), 288-291; id., 'Dux und comes in der Merowingerzeit', *ZSR GA,* 74 (1957), 41-84; Dietrich Claude, 'Untersuchungen zum frühfränkischen Comitat', *ZSR GA,* 81 (1964), 1-79; Alexander Bergengruen, *Adel und Grundherrschaft im Merowingerreich. Siedlungs- und standesgeschichtliche Studie zu den Anfängen des fränkischen Adels in Nordfrankreich und Belgien* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1958), pp. 177-181; and N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, *Histoire des institutions politiques de l'ancienne France,* 6 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1888-1892), III, 196-220.

[49] On ethnogenesis among the barbarians of the Migration Period generally, see Erin Thomas A. Dailey, 'The Vita Gregorii and Ethnogenesis in Anglo-Saxon Britain', *Northern History,* 47 (2010), 195-207; Peter Heather, 'Ethnicity, Group Identity, and Social Status in the Migration Period', *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe,* ed. by Ildar Garipzanov et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 17-50; id., 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes', in *Strategies,* pp. 95-111; id., *Goths and Romans 332-489* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Guido Berndt, *Konflikt und Anpassung. Studien zu Migration und Ethnogenese der Vandalen* (Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 2007); Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the gens Anglorum', reprinted in *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian,* ed. by S. Baxter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 106-134; Walter Pohl, 'Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique: Identités en transformation entre antiquité et moyen âge', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences sociales,* 60 (2005), 183-208; id., 'Identität und Widerspruch: Gedanken zu einer Sinngeschichte des frühen Mittelalters', in *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters,* ed. by id. (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), pp. 24-35; id., 'Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: A Response', in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. by Andrew Gillett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 221-239; id., 'Introduction: Strategies of Distinction', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of the Ethnic Communities, 300-800,* ed. by id. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 1-15; id., 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', in idem., pp. 17-69; id., 'Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective,* ed. by J. Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997); id., 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: Eine Zwischenbilanz', in *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung,* ed. by K. Bruner and B. Merta (Vienna: Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 1994), pp. 9-26; id., 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', *Archaeologia Polona,* 29 (1991), 39-49; Hanz-Werner Goetz, 'Gens. Terminology and Perception of the "Germanic" Peoples from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages', in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages. Texts, Resources, and Artefacts,* ed. by R. Corrandini et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 39-64; Barbara Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon Gentes and Regna', in *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World.* ed. by Hans-Werner Goetz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 381-409; Hubert Fehr, 'Volkstum as Paradigm: Germanic People and Gallo-Romans in Early Medieval Archaeology since the 1930s', in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages,* ed. by Andrew Gillett (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 177-200; Nicholas Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity', in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West,* ed. by Julia Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 221-247; Guy Halsall, 'Movers and Shakers: The Barbarians and the Fall of Rome', *EME,* 8 (1999), 131-145; Herwig Wolfram, 'Auf der Suche nach den

'Merovingian' has been preferred to the term 'Frankish' in reference to the royal family and, by extension, the governmental apparatus and the domains under its purview, except in the specific instances where Gregory himself used the word *Francus*.[50] In these instances, *Francus* seems to refer to the segment of the political elite that was broadly associated with the barbarian military units that had acquired preeminence in Gaul in the late fifth century.[51] As for many of the remaining high-status individuals, such as the members of Gregory's own family, they belonged to the 'senatorial' class –

Ursprüngen', in *Suche*, pp. 11-22; id., *Das Reich und die Germanen. Zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Berlin: Siedler, 1998); id., 'Origo et religio. Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts', *EME*, 3 (1994), 19-38; id., *Geschichte der Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mittle des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnologie*, 2nd edn (Munich: Beck, 1979); Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy 489-554* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Charles Bowlus, 'Ethnogenesis Models and the Age of Migrations: A Critique', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 26 (1995), 147-164; Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Patrick Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), 15-26; Yves Albert Dauge, *Le barbare: Recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbare et de la civilisation* (Brussels: Latomus, 1981); Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1961).

[50] On Frankish ethnic identity and Gregory's use of *Francus*, see Helmut Reimitz, 'The Art of Truth: Historiography and Identity in the Frankish World', in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, 12, ed. by Richard Corradini et al. (Vienna: Österreiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 87-104; id., 'Die Konkurrenz der Ursprünge in der fränkischen Historiographie', in *Suche*, pp. 191-209; id., 'Omnes Franci: Identifications and Identities of the Early Medieval Franks', in *Franks, Northmen*, pp. 51-71; Eugen Ewig, 'Zum Geschichtsbild der Franken und den Anfängen der Merowinger', in *Medievalia Augiensia: Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. by Jürgen Petersohn (Stuttgart: Thoerbecke, 2001), pp. 43-58; Edward James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks', in *After Rome*, pp. 51-66; Ian Wood, 'Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in the Early Medieval Historiography', in *Concepts of National Identity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Simon Forde (Leeds: Leeds School of English, 1995), pp. 21-46; Guy Halsall, *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 29-31; Michel Rouche, 'Francs et Gallo-Romains chez Gregoire de Tours', in *Gregorio di Tours* (Todi: Presso l'Accademia tudertina, 1977), 143-169. These studies are not entirely agreed in their conclusions regarding Gregory's use of the term.

[51] This leaves aside the question regarding the constitution of the group, specifically the unresolved debate over whether or not one can speak of an aristocracy amongst the Franks, which was engaged in by Franz Irsigler, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des frühfränkischen Adels* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1969); and Graus, *Volk*. The issue has been discussed more recently by Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, II, 319-338; and Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 182-184. On the close association between barbarian military units and the development of ethnic identity, see Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 40-53.

an old Roman title, but one which, by the sixth century, depended as much on current wealth and political connections as it did on ancient pedigree.[52]

Since there is no consensus on the rendering of Merovingian names into English, this study has followed the prosopography found in Ian Wood's *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751*, with one exception.[53] The Latinate form 'Chlodovech' has been used for the son of Chilperic and Audovera rather than the form 'Clovis', which has been reserved for the far more famous king of the same name. Regarding individuals unmentioned by the prosopography, those names with an obvious English counterpart, such as Johannes and Leunardus, have been given in the English form, i.e. 'John' and 'Leonard', and the Latinate endings have been dropped from Germanic names (thus 'Gundulf' appears in favour of *Gundulfus*). Cities and regions have been rendered by their modern placename, when one exists. Of course, with such conventions it is impossible to be completely systematic. As a final technical issue, all translations given in this study are original, although the translations of Gregory's works by O. M. Dalton, Raymond Van Dam, and Edward James have been consulted, as well as those of Venantius Fortunatus by Judith W. George.[54]

This study on Gregory of Tours and the women in his works aims to contribute to scholarship on Early Medieval history by providing an analysis of one of the field's fundamental sources of information. Because Gregory is so important for analysing the sixth century, and because certain women were so important to him, it is difficult to utilise his corpus of writings without fully engaging with his thematic presentation of women. Methodologically, the approach of this study is to determine Gregory's opinions and the literary techniques he used to express them, to isolate his

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[52] On the rank of senator, and its meaning in sixth-century Gaul, see Brian Brennan, 'Senators and Social Mobility in Sixth Century Gaul', *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 145-161; Geary, *Before France*, pp. 28-35; Frank Gilliard, 'The Senators of Sixth-Century Gaul', *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 675-697; Karl Friedrich Stroheker, 'Die Senatoren bei Gregor von Tours', reprinted in *Germanentum und Spätantike*, ed. by id. (Zurich: Artemis, 1965), pp. 192-206; id., *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1948), pp. 112-116; and Godefroid Kurth, 'Les Sénateurs en Gaule au VIe siècle', in *Études franques*, II, 97-115.

[53] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 350-363.

[54] Raymond Van Dam, *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Confessors*, 2nd edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004); id., *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs*, 2nd edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004); id., *Saints*; Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995); Edward James, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, 2nd edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991); and O. M. Dalton, *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

interpretation of events, and then to make preliminary suggestions regarding alternative reconstructions of those events. There is, admittedly, some philosophical tension between viewing Gregory's works first and foremost as literature, while at the same time using those works empirically to determine past events. Therefore, both aspects of the analysis have been undertaken together, in a simultaneous dialogue. Each chapter begins and ends with an examination on one aspect of Gregory as an author, making insights into his historical context and the veracity of his information along the way. Hopefully, this new interpretation of Gregory will help to facilitate the harmonisation of opinions about the remarkable Bishop of Tours by introducing an essential aspect of his character into the current state of scholarship.

I

WIDOWS AND WIDOWHOOD

Morals mattered to Gregory of Tours. As a Christian, he knew that one's eternal destiny depended on one's earthly deeds, and, as a bishop, he felt a duty to impress this upon his audience. It is little surprise, therefore, to find a hint of the preacher in his works. What is rather more unexpected, however, is that the moral behaviour of widows was a principal concern of his, and that he allowed this to shape his narrative deeply. Gregory viewed widowhood as an opportunity for a woman to devote herself to God, unhindered by the burdens of the world. Gregory praised the women who accepted this calling and scorned those who remained active in worldly affairs. Indeed, some of the most notorious individuals in Gregory's narrative are widows obsessed with remaining politically relevant, even if it cost them their souls. Moreover, Gregory was willing to manipulate his material in order to remain consistent in his avocation of this moral theme, and this is revealed by an examination of other sources, combined with a critical reading of his narrative. Gregory's keen interest in widowhood may be explained, in part, by his close relationship with his own mother, Armentaria, who lived most of her life as a widow. Gregory may also have been influenced by Merovingian canonical legislation, which included a liturgical benediction for widows recognising them as penitents who shunned the temptations of the world. Whatever the origin of Gregory's opinions on widowhood, the manner in which he expressed these opinions in his works must be identified, if they are to be used for historical reconstructions involving the prominent widows of his day.

Armentaria

Armentaria appears on several occasions in Gregory's works, each designed to highlight a different aspect of her remarkable piety. Gregory never intended to give a comprehensive narrative of her life, although a few biographical details can be discerned from his scattered references to her. Armentaria was born, perhaps in the

510s, into an important Burgundian family, with connections throughout Gaul.[1] She was related to at least seven contemporary bishops, as well as at least one high ranking Austrasian secular official, and her illustrious ancestors included the likes of Gregory of Langres, who had served as *Comes* of Autun for forty years and as Bishop of Langres for thirty-two years.[2] In 533, Armentaria married a man named Florentius, who was from an equally dignified house of the Auvergne that traced its ancestry back to Vettius Epagathus, a senator martyred in Lyons in 177.[3] She had at least three children by him: a daughter and two sons, including Gregory, who may have been born in 538.[4] Florentius died sometime before 551, while Armentaria was probably in her 30s, and while Gregory was still rather young.[5] She therefore lived most of her life as a widow, appearing for the last time in Gregory's works in 587; and it is possible that she even lived beyond Gregory's own death in the November of 594.[6]

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[1] The year of Armentaria's birth can only be guessed by working backwards from her marriage in 533 (below). On Armentaria's life, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 148 (nr 35); Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 13-14 (nr 9); Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 251-254; and Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 52, 55-56.

[2] On Armentaria's relations, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 10-21. On Gregory of Langres specifically, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, pp. 178-179 (nr 182); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 68, 163-164; and Martin Heinzelmann, 'Galische Prosopographie, 260-527', *Francia*, 10 (1983), 531-718 (at p. 563). As a child, Armentaria had been cured from an illness by lying in the bed of Gregory of Langres, which was known for its miraculous properties (VP 7.2), and so it is probably not a coincidence that her son took the name Gregory as well.

[3] On the martyrdom of Vettius Epagathus in Gregory's works, see Hist. 1.29; GM 48; and VP 6.1 (for the familial connection); with Wood, 'Individuality', pp. 37-38. On Florentius, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 176 (nr 163); and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 249-251. Armentaria's marriage to Florentius is dated by its proximity to the death of King Theuderic (see GM 83 and Hist. 3.23).

[4] The year is derived from a miracle story in VM 3.10, although this may reference the birth of one of Gregory's siblings instead. The uncertain identity of this offspring is explained in Wood, *Gregory*, pp. 4-5; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 254-255, n. 43. Some manuscripts remove the ambiguity; see Bruno Krusch, 'Appendix. Tomus I. Georgii Florentii Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri viii miraculorum', in *MGH SRM*, 7 (Hannover: 1920), pp. 707-756 (at p. 715, n. 3); and id., 'Gregorii episcopi Turonensis decem libri historiarum: Praefatio', in *MGH SRM*, 1.1 (Hannover, 1951), pp. ix-xxxviii (at p. xi, n. 2). For another argument that Gregory was born in 538 (or earlier), based on his age at ordination, see Gabriel Monod, *Études critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne. Première partie Introduction, Grégoire de Tours, Marius d'Avenches* (Paris: Franck, 1872), pp. 27-28; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 205-206; Pirtri, *Ville*, p. 254, n. 43; and Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 225, n. 44.

[5] The date of Florentius's death is uncertain. At some point in his youth, Gregory was entrusted to the care of his uncle Gallus, presumably upon his father's death. Gallus himself passed away in 551, providing the *terminus ante quem*. See Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 11, 13-14, 26-29; Pietri, *Ville*, p. 256, n. 49; and Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 52-53 and nn. 12, 14.

[6] Heinzelmann, 'Source', p. 240. On the date of Gregory's death, see Monod, *Études*, p. 38; Krusch, 'Gregorii episcopi', pp. xviii-xix; and Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 220.

Gregory's narrative leaves no doubt that he was very close to his mother, and it is to be expected that her brand of spirituality left a lasting impression on him, beginning in his formative years.[7] For example, when Gregory was so young that he was still studying the letters of the alphabet, he was approached by a man in a dream who told him to write the name of Joshua, son of Nun, on a piece of wood and place it under his sick father's pillow.[8] Gregory asked his mother for instruction and, upon her advice, he followed the vision's directions and, as a result, his father was cured. The next year, the event repeated itself, although this time the man told Gregory to employ a cure from the Book of Tobit, in which the bowels of a fish were burned in order to produce a kind of smoke, and, again, Gregory's father was cured from illness.[9] In turning to his mother on both occasions, Gregory had sought the help of an experienced visionary. In 543, after a plague broke out in Clermont, Armentaria had a foreboding dream in which the wine in her cellars turned to blood. Motivated by this sign, she managed to save her family from the pestilence that overtook her neighbours by observing the Feast of St. Benignus, from the vigil through to the morning Mass.[10] When these various pieces of information are taken together, it suggests that Gregory's mother played an important role in forming his belief in oneiric revelation.[11]

Gregory presented Armentaria as his spiritual superior, who had acquired an intimate knowledge of God through her unhindered faith and devotion. Gregory recounted a miraculous occurrence during the Feast of St. Polycarp, when a vessel containing the Body of Christ leapt from the hands of a sinful deacon and danced away from his grasp. Armentaria, along with two other women and a priest, was able to see

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[7] On Gregory's presentation of maternal affection, see Jean Verdon, 'Les Femmes laïques en Gaule au temps des mérovingiens: les réalités de la vie quotidienne', in *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, ed. by Werner Affeldt (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 239-261 (at pp. 252-253).

[8] GC 39. On the interpretation of *notae litterarum* as referring to the letters of the alphabet, see Max Bonnet, *Le latin de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: Hachette, 1890), p. 49; Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth through Eighth Centuries*, trans. by John J. Contreni (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), p. 191. Krusch held that this phrase referred to tachygraphy ('Gregorii episcopi', pp. ix-xxii). See also Van Dam, *Confessors*, p. 31, n. 44. On the vision in the passage, see Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca and London: Catholic University Press, 2000), pp. 83-84.

[9] Cf. Tobit 11:1-13. On this cure, see Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1991), p. 307. On the fish native to Gaul in Late Antiquity, see West, *Roman*, pp. 63-67; and Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, II, 368.

[10] GC 50; also Hist. 4.5; VP 6.6. See Moreira, *Dreams*, p. 83; and de Nie, *Views*, pp. 261-262.

[11] Moreira, *Dreams*, pp. 84-86.

the miracle. 'I must admit that, although I was at this festival, I was not worthy to see it,' Gregory wrote, in order to show that, even as an adult, he still had much to learn from his mother's example.[12] A similar theme seems to have been at work in Gregory's story about some relics kept in a gold medallion, which had once belonged to his father, and which Armentaria had used, miraculously, to extinguish a huge fire in the fields on her property. Years later, Gregory used the relics to fork an ominous thunderstorm, which threatened him while he was on one of his journeys. 'In my heart I began to think that this had occurred because of my own personal merits, rather than those of the saints,' Gregory wrote, before adding that, as a divine admonition, he was immediately and embarrassingly bucked from his horse.[13] One doubts that Armentaria would ever have made such a foolish mistake.

Gregory's interest in the power of relics, like his belief in the interpretation of dreams, surely owed something to his mother, especially since her household had once been saved from a fire by the relics of St. Eusebius of Vercelli, which she had obtained and deposited in the domestic oratory.[14] Gregory's decision to become an author may also have been due to Armentaria's influence. In the prologue of what was probably his first major work, his *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, Gregory stated that he was inspired to write when his mother urged him to record the cures that St. Martin had bestowed upon the crippled and the diseased.[15] The fact that Gregory recounted this in the context of a vision only emphasises the point.[16] Furthermore, Gregory added that

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[12] GM 85, '*Aderam, fateor, et ego tunc temporis huic festivitati, sed haec videre non merui*' On Gregory's notion that only the spiritually worthy could experience certain miracles, see Edward James, 'A Sense of Wonder: Gregory of Tours, Medicine and Science', in *The Culture of Christendom*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: Hambeldon Press, 1993), pp. 45-60 (at pp. 51-52). A different tradition of interpretation, represented in the works of Augustine, held that evil people were sometimes able to see and even perform miracles; see Hayward, 'Demystifying'. This serves as a note of caution for the hypothesis that Gregory was deeply inspired by Augustinian theology.

[13] GM 83, '*...coepi et tacitus cogitare, non haec tantum sanctorum meritis quam mihi propiae fuisse concessum.*' On these relics, see James, 'Sense', pp. 49-50.

[14] GC 3.

[15] On the VM as Gregory's earliest known literary production, see Bonnet, *Latin*, p. 13; with Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 124-125 and n. 56. It must have been published in an early form, since Gregory was still adding to this work until 593, as evidenced by the account in VM 4.37. See also the chronological list of Gregory's works found in Jean Verdon, *Grégoire de Tours: Le père de l'Histoire de France* (Le Coteau: Horvath, 1989), pp. 80, 84; and Wood, *Gregory*, p. 3. Certain reservations were expressed by Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 29-30. The chronology of the *Historiae* is discussed further in Chapter IV.

[16] On VM 1 preface, see, Moreira, *Dreams*, pp. 85-86; and de Nie, *Views*, p. 215.

he needed his mother's encouragement. He thought that he was not fit to be an author because of his literary inadequacies, but Armentaria convinced him that his simple manner of speech was actually an asset, since it would help him reach a wide audience. Although this passage, crediting Armentaria as Gregory's inspiration to write, pertains only to the *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, it is reminiscent of the preface to the *Historiae*, where Gregory asked his audience to forgive his inelegant style and to remember that it at least had the advantage of being comprehensible by the general populace. This similarity may suggest that Armentaria had also been influential in Gregory's decision to write his history, and not just his hagiography on St. Martin.[17]

Gregory's idealised portrait of his mother is indicative of more than just the extent to which her piety rubbed off on him. Gregory's information is clearly selective, omitting any discussion of the worldly affairs that must have burdened Armentaria during her widowhood. For example, Gregory briefly, and vaguely, mentioned that his father Florentius had been taken hostage on the orders of King Theudebert, along with other important men from Clermont, shortly after his marriage to Armentaria.[18] Although this must have been a significant event in Armentaria's life, Gregory provided no further information. Indeed, he only mentioned it so that he could explain the origin of the reliquary passed on to his mother from his father, since Florentius had acquired the relics at this time in order to protect himself on his journey as a hostage. Nor did Gregory make any mention of his father's release from custody, which can only be dated as prior to 538, when Armentaria gave birth to one of Florentius's children. Furthermore, Gregory's brief reference to the event appears in his hagiography, but not in his parallel account in the *Historiae*, where he described Theudebert's activity in Clermont just prior to Theuderic's death in 533, which presumably refers to the same event, though Gregory declined to make the correlation explicit.[19]

Armentaria appears in Gregory's works only as someone exclusively concerned with the pursuit of sanctity. Nonetheless, she clearly had temporal responsibilities that

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[17] Wood, *Gregory*, p. 36; Wood, 'Individuality', p. 39.
[18] GM 83. On Gregory's attitude toward Theudebert, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 231-233.
[19] Hist. 3.23. See Van Dam, *Martyrs*, p. 79, n. 96. On the other hand, the striking parallels between this passage and Gregory's story of Attalus, which he gave a few chapters before (Hist. 3.15), may suggest a literary explanation.

came with the usual obligations and distractions. After becoming a widow, for example, Armentaria seems to have taken over the management of the family estates in the Limagne.[20] She probably also had oversight of a network of other estates in various places, including Dijon and Lyons.[21] Later, she resided on her property in Chalon-sur-Saône, which was something of a capital for the King of Burgundy.[22] Armentaria's personal oversight of this property may be assumed, in spite of Gregory's lack of information, since women in Merovingian Gaul normally retained their estates and the use of some of their late husbands' property throughout their widowhood, as long as they did not remarry – and, as a Gallo-Roman, Armentaria was subject to Roman law.[23] In managing this property, and the risks entailed, Armentaria stood to gain from carefully cultivating the political connections already extant within her familial network. This is not to suggest that she placed worldly matters above spiritual matters, which was surely not the case, but only that she was at least distracted by them, even if Gregory was not interested in discussing this aspect of her widowhood.

Of course, Gregory may not necessarily have seen estate management as a worldly distraction. For example, he recounted how the widow Pelagia had taken charge of her son Aridius's property, so that he could focus on building churches, acquiring relics, and founding a monastery in the Limousin.[24] Aridius's pious projects were funded by the income from the estates under Pelagia's careful management, and when the widow died in 586, Gregory emphasised that she was recognised as a saint.[25]

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[20] GM 83.

[21] Wood, *Gregory*, pp. 6-7. On the landholdings of Gregory's family, see also Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 171-172. On the importance of Lyons for travel and trade, see West, *Roman*, p. 16.

[22] VM 1.36, 3.60. For Guntram's use of Chalon-sur-Saône as a centre for his court, see Hist. 7.21, 8.10, and 9.20. On the identification of *in terretorium Cavellonensis urbis* as Chalon-sur-Saône, see Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 283, n. 93; and Pietri, *Ville*, p. 253, n. 40. It was identified as Cavaillon by May Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1976), pp. 73, 76; and Bruno Krusch, 'Georgii Florentii Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri octo miraculorum', in *MGH SRM*, 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 451-484 (at p. 647, n. 1).

[23] See Wemple, *Women*, pp. 46-47, 60-61; Arjava, 'Survival', p. 48; Ennen, *Frauen*, pp. 38-39; and Fustel de Coulanges, *Histoire*, IV, 142-148.

[24] Hist. 10.29. On Aridius, see Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, pp. 44-45 (nr 16); Van Dam, *Confessors*, p. 9, n. 14; id., *Martyrs*, p. 35, n. 43; id., *Saints*, p. 182, n. 19; and James, *Gregory*, p. 104, n. 1. On the monastery, later known as Saint-Yrieix, and its oratory, which housed relics of St. Martin, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 277-278.

[25] On the date of Pelagia's death, see Van Dam, *Confessors*, p. 77, n. 133. Pelagia's sanctity is also mentioned in the *Vita Aredii abbatis Lemovicni*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 3 (Hannover, 1896), 3.

Her funeral was accompanied by miracles, and her corpse emitted a pleasant fragrance during her wake.[26] However, Gregory also knew that estate management had its risks, as he detailed in his account of Domnola. After the execution of her husband on the charge of *lèse-majesté*, Domnola found herself in a protracted dispute with Bobolen, the Neustrian *referendarius*, over the ownership of a vineyard, which she thought was her rightful inheritance from her father's estate.[27] Bobolen forbade her to enter the property and, when she disregarded his injunction, he put her and all of her companions to death.[28] Perhaps Gregory had no trouble recounting Domnola's fate because, unlike the holy Pelagia, she had remarried in her widowhood. Yet this only emphasises the point: even though her new husband, Nectarius, had been no less than a Neustrian court official, and her father no less than the Bishop of Rennes, such political connections had not been enough to protect Domnola from Bobolen's cruelty.[29] One suspects that Pelagia had felt the same sense of vulnerability, and that this may have been the reason why her son Aridius left his position as the apprentice of Nicetius, Bishop of Trier, in order to care for her upon her husband's death.[30] Although Gregory was only interested in describing the cooperative efforts of Pelagia and Aridius, even going so far as to describe a miracle where the two acted remarkably like Mary and Jesus in the biblical account of the Wedding at Cana, one naturally suspects that both Pelagia and Armentaria faced threats similar to those that caused the downfall of Domnola, and

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[26] GC 102. The fragrance was presumably also miraculous, although Gregory mentioned embalming procedures involving spices in GC 104. This procedure was also mentioned by Constantinus of Lyons, *Vita sancti Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis*, ed. by René Borius, *Constance de Lyon, Vie de saint Germain d'Auxerre* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965), 2.2; and Hincmar of Rheims, *Annales bertiniani*, ed. by C. Dehaisnes, *Les annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast* (Paris: Reynouard, 1871), anno 877. Embalming in this context is discussed in Crook, *Architectural*, pp. 35-36.

[27] On the downfall of Domnola's husband, see Hist. 5.25. On Bobolen, see Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, p. 61; and Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 93.

[28] Hist. 8.32; cf. 8.43.

[29] On Nectarius's influence at the Neustrian court, see Hist. 7.15. On her father Victorius, Bishop of Rennes, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 186.

[30] Hist. 10.29. On Nicetius of Trier, see VP 17; with Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte* I, 221-222; Ewig, 'L'Aquitaine', p. 560; Nancy Gauthier, *L'Évangélisation des pays de la Moselle: la province romaine de Première Belgique entre antiquité et Moyen Âge (IIIe-VIIIe siècles)* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1980), pp. 172-189; Heinz Heinen, *Trier und das Treverland in römischer Zeit* (Trier: Spee, 1985), pp. 332-334; and Roger Collins, 'Theudebert I, 'Rex Magnus Francorum'', in *Ideal*, pp. 6-33 (at pp. 22-25).

that their ability to retain their property owed something to skilful political manoeuvring, and not simply piety alone.[31]

Not only did widows normally administer their estates, but they also usually had legal authority over those of their children who were still minors, and they often kept particularly close relations with their sons who entered the clergy, even well into adulthood.[32] Armentaria's two sons, Peter and Gregory, both pursued ecclesiastical careers, and there is some reason to think that she was involved in the realisation of their episcopal ambitions. Raymond van Dam has suggested that Gregory's appointment as Bishop of Tours in 573 was initially controversial, at least on the local level.[33] Gregory claimed that the See had consistently been occupied by a member of his family, but this does not seem to have filled him with a sense of security, and it is telling that he only arrived in Tours to accept the post after he had first visited the shrine of St. Julian, tearing off some of the fringe from the cloth covering his patron saint's tomb for protection.[34] After his arrival, Gregory also received comfort from his mother, who came to Tours and visited her son, *causa desiderii mei*, as Gregory put it.[35] She may well have given him political and financial support as well, at this moment when his acquisition of the See of Tours was in jeopardy. If so, it seems to have worked, since Gregory managed to secure his position without further immediate ado.

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[31] While on a journey to the church of St. Julian at Brioude, Aridius and Pelagia ran short of water, but Pelagia, in words similar to those of the Blessed Virgin, informed her son of their lack of refreshment, and Aridius in turn miraculously produced the needed supply. The Vulgate (John 2:3) reads, *'dicit mater Iesu ad eum vinum non habent'*, while Gregory's words (Hist. 10.29) are *'Dixitque ad eum mater eius: 'Fili, aquam non habemus'*. The similarities may have derived from a conscious effort on Gregory's part at typological comparison, or simply from his immersion in the language of scripture. For the influence of biblical language on Gregory's prose, see Bonnet, *Latin*, pp. 53-61; Paul Antin, 'Emplois de la Bible chez Grégoire de Tours et Mgr Pie', *Latomus*, 26 (1967), 778-782; and id., 'Notes sur le style de Grégoire de Tours', *Latomus*, 22 (1963), 273-284.

[32] Wemple, *Women*, p. 60, citing VP 8.1. On maternal relationships in Late Antiquity in general, see Gillian Clarke, 'This Female Man of God': *Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 140-150.

[33] Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 63-66. See also Wood, *Gregory*, pp. 10-13.

[34] Gregory's claim regarding the former bishops of Tours (Hist. 5.49) has proved difficult to substantiate; see Ralph Mathisen, 'The Family of Georgius Florentius Gregorius and the bishop of Tours', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 12 (1984), 83-95; Wood, 'Individuality, p. 37 and n. 51; Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 21-26; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 135, 186. On the visit to Julian's shrine in the Auvergne, see VJ 34; with Bruekelarr, *Historiography*, p. 37. On Julian as Gregory's patron saint, see VJ 50.

[35] VM 3.10.

Similarly, Gregory's brother, Peter, had once found himself enmeshed in episcopal politics, and he too had turned to his family for assistance, in an episode that may be suggestive of Armentaria's involvement.[36] The See of Langres, where Peter served as a deacon, had long been occupied by a member of her family.[37] When her uncle, the incumbent bishop Tetricus, died in the early 570s, the see was expected to pass to a man named Sylvester, who was also one of her relatives, perhaps even a sibling.[38] However, Sylvester unexpectedly died, and his son, along with one of Peter's enemies in Langres, accused Peter of murdering Sylvester. In response, Peter went to Lyons and cleared himself before an ecclesiastical tribunal overseen by Nicetius, who was Armentaria's uncle.[39] It is difficult to imagine that Armentaria could have remained detached from a set of events involving her uncles Nicetius and Tetricus, her son Peter, and two other close relatives (Sylvester and his unnamed son). One suspects that she may even have been the one who solicited Nicetius's involvement, since she had turned to the Bishop of Lyons once before, when she asked him to educate and mentor her son Gregory when he was young.[40] In his account of Peter's troubles, Gregory decided not to mention any involvement Armentaria may have had in the family affair, which ended tragically two years later, in 574, when Sylvester's son waylaid Peter on the road and murdered him.[41]

Gregory's silence about his mother's involvement in Peter's ultimately tragic ecclesiastical career is similar to other instances, where one can offer only measured speculation about her political dealings. For example, one can only guess whether or not Armentaria had been a witness to the failed assassination attempt on King

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[36] On Peter, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 296 (nr 299); and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 10-11 (nr 1).

[37] On Langres as a family bishopric, see Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 3.2; with Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 163-165.

[38] On Tetricus, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 233 (nr 385); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 164; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 16-17 (nr 13). On Sylvester, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 219 (nr 359); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 164; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 15 (nr 10).

[39] Hist. 5.5. On Nicetius, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 195 (nr 259); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 168-170; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 20 (nr 18).

[40] VP 8.2-3; VJ 2; GC 61. However, for a reconstruction that minimises Nicetius's role in Gregory's upbringing, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 30-37.

[41] On the familial nature of the dispute, and Gregory's narration, see Wood, 'Individuality', pp. 40-41. Gregory showed his emotions most when writing about his family, see Barbara Rosenwein, 'Even the Devil (Sometimes) has Feelings: Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages', *Haskins Society Journal* 14 (2003), 1-14 (at 6-9).

Guntram of Burgundy that took place during Mass in the cathedral of Chalon-sur-Saône on 4 September 587. She was then a resident of the city, and a regular attendee of holy feasts, yet Gregory described the dramatic event without reference to her.[42] There is, perhaps, even more to the matter. Gregory had visited with his mother in the city, and he had met with Veranus, Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saône, both in the same year as the assassination attempt.[43] In the same September, Veranus had presided over the baptism of an Austrasian prince, in what amounted to a diplomatic prelude to the Treaty of Andelot, made two months later, which brought Burgundy and Austrasia into a political alignment.[44] Gregory had acted as an envoy between Guntram and the Austrasian king Childebert on other occasions, and one suspects that he may have served a diplomatic function this time as well.[45] If so, then the issue of his mother's involvement also deserves attention, since she was a natural point of contact between Veranus and Gregory.

Armentaria had her connections to the Merovingian ruling dynasty. For example, her uncle, Gundulf, served as a *dux* for the Austrasian king.[46] Gundulf's name is itself intriguing, not only because it is Germanic, but also because the element *gun-* hints at a relation to the Burgundian royal family, since it was shared by the kings Gundioc, Gundobad, Gunthar, and Guntram.[47] Similarly, Armentaria's daughter married a man named Justinus, who might be the same Justinus that served as *Comes* of Tours under King Sigibert.[48] Presumably, Armentaria had a hand in arranging the marriage, and, even if this Justinus was not the royal official, the marriage is still suggestive of her involvement in the politics of her well-connected family. Like the

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[42] Hist. 9.3.

[43] VM 3.60. For the date, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 217.

[44] Hist. 9.4, 9.10-11, 9.20. On Veranus, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 147-148.

[45] Hist. 9.20. The above evidence has been analysed in regards to Gregory's involvement in the events in Chalon-sur-Saône by Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 61-62 and nn. 58-59; and Wood, 'Individuality', p. 45.

[46] On Gundulf, see Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, pp. 108-109 (nr 118); Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 190 (nr 184); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 57; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 19-20 (nr 17). Gregory mentioned Gundulf in Hist. 6.11, where he claimed that he only learned of his relation with Gundulf in 581, when the *dux* resupplied in Tours on his way to Marseilles. On Gregory's reluctance to be forthcoming about his own relations, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 8-10; and Wood, 'Individuality', pp. 38-40.

[47] Eugen Ewig, 'Die Namengebung bei den ältesten Frankenkönigen und im merowingischen Königshaus', *Francia*, 18 (1991), 21-69 (at 26-27, 42-43).

[48] On Justinus, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 187 (nr 209). On his possible association with the *Comes* of Tours, see Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, pp. 119-120 (nr 129).

other evidence for Armentaria's continued interest in worldly affairs that can be distilled from Gregory's information, it cannot be pushed too far, and any conclusions remain highly speculative. When all this evidence is taken together, however, one is left with the distinct impression that Armentaria was concerned with more than just pious devotion during her widowhood. Of course, there is little reason to doubt that Armentaria was genuinely dedicated to God, and it should be noted that Venantius Fortunatus also praised her piety.[49] Indeed, it is undeniable that Armentaria spent much of her widowhood in pious pursuits, and that this aspect of her life left a lasting impression on her son. Nonetheless, Gregory's presentation of his mother represents a literary construction, in which he carefully selected his information in order to present Armentaria as an example of how a widow should conduct herself, omitting anything to the contrary. Indeed, his narrative may fairly be seen as an attempt to reconcile the story of Armentaria's life with the ideal that both she and her son upheld: upon becoming a widow, a woman had the opportunity to shun the world and its constraints, pursuing sanctity with a singular focus. When compared to this idealised portrait of widowhood, many other women in Gregory's works fell well short of the mark.

Bad Widows: Theudogild, Goiswinth, and Sophia

If one were to look for the opposite of Armentaria and Pelagia in Gregory's works, Theudogild would be a good place to start. She had been married to King Charibert, but when he died in 567, she did not feel inclined to retire to her estates in the pursuit of sanctity. Instead, she offered herself in marriage to King Guntram, who feigned acceptance simply to trick her out of much of her wealth. After gaining her trust by promising, 'I will receive her and make her great among the populace, so that she shall enjoy more honour with me than she had with my brother', Guntram robbed her of her possessions, and forced her into a monastery in Arles.[50] The king himself did not escape Gregory's criticism on this matter. In particular, Guntram's justification for the theft – 'it is proper that this treasure should belong to me, rather than that woman, who

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[49] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 10.15.
[50] Hist. 4.26, '*Ego enim accipiam eam faciamque magnam in populis, ut scilicet maiorem mecum honorem quam cum germano meo... potiatur.*' The monastery in Arles was presumably Caesaria's monastery of Saint-Jean, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 38-39.

was unworthy to approach my brother's bed' – is deeply ironic, considering his own habit of taking unworthy wives.[51] Nonetheless, Gregory also meant the label *indigna* as an insult to Theudogild, and it was not his last. Gregory also wrote that, as a nun, Theudogild was lacklustre in her piety, and she eventually hatched a plan to leave the monastery by offering herself and her remaining wealth to an unidentified Visigoth (*quidam Gothus*), in the hopes that he would take her to Spain. The Visigoths featured as Arian heretics in the *Historiae* (discussed below), and so this probably ought to be seen as akin to the selling of her soul. In any case, Theudogild's abbess discovered the plot, and had the former queen beaten and placed in confinement, where she remained until the end of her life. It is difficult to miss the irony in Gregory's account, since Theudogild lived out her days in utter misery in the very institution designed to facilitate the quest for sanctity – if only that had been her desire upon becoming a widow.

One reason why Visigothic Spain was comparable to the inferno in the *Historiae* is that, according to Gregory, it was ruled by a most villainous queen, who, it so happens, was also a remarried widow. Queen Goiswinth, in Gregory's estimation, had been responsible for a large scale persecution (*magna persecutio*) of Catholics in Spain in 579. 'Many were driven into exile, robbed of their belongings, withered by starvation, tossed into prison, scourged by the lash, or butchered through various tortures,' Gregory wrote, before identifying the bad widow as the culprit: 'The leader of all these crimes was Goiswinth, who had been taken in marriage by King Leovigild after King Athanagild.'[52] Gregory had already mentioned the marital arrangements of the Visigothic house earlier in the *Historiae*, but he apparently felt that Goiswinth's two unions, and thus her status as a remarried widow, deserved mention in this context.[53] Gregory left no doubt about her diabolic wickedness, writing that, as a sign of God's wrath, 'Goiswinth herself was marked before the entire populace: one of her eyes was clouded white, so that the light vanished from her iris, just as her mind had already

[51] Hist. 4.26, '*Rectius est enim, ut hi thesauri penes me habeantur, quam post hanc, quae indigne germani mei torum adivit.*'

[52] Hist. 5.38, '*...multique exiliis dati, facultatibus privati, fame decocti, carcere mancipati, verberibus adfecti ac diversis suppliciis trucidati sunt. Caput quoque huius sceleris Goisuenta fuit, quam post Athanachilde regis conubium rex Leuvichildus acceperat.*'

[53] Hist. 4.38.

ceased to be illuminated.'[54] Included in the victims of the persecution was Goiswinth's own granddaughter, Ingund, whom the queen assaulted with her own hands, dashing her head against the ground and kicking her until, bleeding, she was stripped and forced into the baptismal font.

Gregory added that the heretical widow had no regard for the princess's words of resistance: 'I profess the Holy Trinity to be one co-equality, which I believe with my whole heart, and never shall I waiver from this faith.'[55] This statement closely parallels the proclamation that Gregory put in the mouth of a young senatorial girl, mentioned earlier in the *Historiae*, who suffered at the hands of the Vandal king Thrasamund, and who was forced into the Arian baptismal font: 'I believe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one substance.'[56] Of course, the common thread is the Catholic belief in the Trinity, but both professions of faith are also similar in that they were uttered by girls persecuted in Spain, and in many ways the land itself features as a villain in Gregory's works.[57] For example, Clovis's daughter, Chlothild, had also been abused on account of her Catholic faith, at the hands of her Visigothic husband, King Amalaric.[58] Likewise,

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[54] Hist. 5.36, '...*ipsa quoque est omnibus populis facta nutabilis. Nam unum oculum nubs alba contegens, lumen, quod mens non habebat pepulit a palpebris.*'

[55] Hist 5.38, '*Trinetatem in una aequalitate esse confessam. Haec me credere ex corde toto confiteor nec umquam ab hac fide ibo retrorsum.*' In Hist. 9.24, Gregory added the detail that Phronimius, Bishop of Agde, had urged Ingund to keep her faith, as she travelled through the city on her way to be married to Hermenegild. On Phronimius, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 135.

[56] Hist 2.2, '*Patrem eum Filio ac Spiritum sanctum unius credo esse substantiae.*' On Gregory's account of the unnamed senatorial girl, see Danuta Shanzer, 'History, Romance, Love, and Sex in Gregory of Tours' Decem Libri Historiarum', in *GoT*, pp. 395-418 (at pp. 408-409).

[57] On Gregory's presentation of the Visigoths and Vandals as wicked Arians, see Ed James, 'Gregory of Tours and Arianism', in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 327-338; Walter Goffart, 'Foreigners in the Histories of Gregory of Tours', reprinted in *Rome's Fall*, pp. 275-291 (at pp. 285-286). On Gregory's view of Arianism, see Ed James, 'Gregory of Tours, the Visigoths and Spain', in *Cross, Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in Memory of Richard Fletcher*, ed. by Simon Barton and Peter Linehan (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 43-64; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 213-214; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 278-281; Moreira, *Dreams*, pp. 105-106; Martin Heinzelmann, 'Heresy in Books I and II of Gregory of Tours' Historiae', in *After Rome*, pp. 67-82; and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', pp. 58-60. Gregory also mischaracterised the Burgundian kingdom an thoroughly Arian prior to its conquest by the Merovingians, when it in fact seems to have been rather mixed; see Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp. 19-20; and Ian Wood, 'Misremembering the Burgundians', in *Suche*, pp. 139-150 (at pp. 143-144).

[58] Hist. 3.10. According to Gregory, the younger Chlothild died following a Merovingian campaign against Amalaric intended to rescue her. On some of the issues in the sources regarding this campaign, see E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 11-12; and Roger Collins, 'Isidore, Maximus and the Historia Gothorum', in

during the Arian celebrations of Easter, the springs in Spain remained dry, only to be filled on the day that Catholics observed the feast, though, predictably, the inhabitants of the region failed to heed this clear sign.[59] The Visigoths themselves were defined by a number of negative qualities: they had the custom (*mos*) of selling out those under their protection, the habit (*consuetudo*) of fleeing the field of battle, and the habit (*consuetudo*) of killing kings according to their own whimsy.[60] It is little surprise, therefore, to find Gregory vilifying Goiswinth, the Visigothic queen of Spain, and her conduct during her widowhood is simply one aspect of this greater literary aim.

There are reasons to question Gregory's presentation of both the enormity of Goiswinth's persecution, and the poor character of the queen. Although Gregory wrote that her persecution was so widespread that there were only a few (*pauci*) Catholics left in Spain, recent scholarship has tended to minimise the extent of the persecution.[61] It has proved difficult to locate many specific victims in the sources, and Gregory's information is in apparent conflict with an account of an Arian synod convoked by Leovigild in 580, which disavowed the practice of rebaptism in favour of the laying on of hands, and which, according to the Lusitanian born chronicler John of Biclaro, enjoyed a good measure of success.[62] Similarly, Goiswinth was regarded very differently by Gregory's friend and colleague, Venantius Fortunatus, who described her as a sympathetic figure in his *De Gelesuintha*.[63] The poem took as its subject the

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Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter, ed. by Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1994), pp. 345-358 (at pp. 355-357).

[59] Hist. 5.17, 6.43, 10.24.

[60] Hist. 2.27, 2.37, 3.30.

[61] Hist. 6.18. See Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409-711* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 58-62; id., *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000*, 2nd edn (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 50-53; Thompson, *Goths*, pp. 78-87; and Knut Schäferdiek, *Die Kirche in den Reichen der Westgoten und Suewen bis zur Errichtung der westgotischen katholischen Staatskirche* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), pp. 165-179.

[62] John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 580. Gregory seems to have had some awareness of Leovigild's efforts, given his statements in Hist. 6.18. On rebaptism and the council, see Karl Friedrich Stroheker, 'Leovigild', reprinted in *Germanentum*, pp. 134-191 (at pp. 173-175); and Schäferdiek, *Kirche*, pp. 159-164. Isidore of Seville, however, also saw the persecution in dramatic terms, stating that King Leovigild had rebaptised both laymen and bishops, but his account, like Gregory's, lacks specifics (*Historia Gothorum*, 50).

[63] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 6.5. On the poem, see George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 96-101; G. Davis, 'Ad sidera notus: Strategies of Lament and Consolation in Fortunatus's De Gelesuintha', *Agon*, 1 (1967), 118-134; and Michael Roberts, 'Venantius Fortunatus' Elegy on the Death of Galswintha (Carm. 6.5)', in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul*, ed. by Ralph Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 298-312.

death of Goiswinth's daughter, Galswinth, who had been murdered by her husband Chilperic, although the exact circumstances of her tragic demise were passed over in silence.[64] On three occasions, Fortunatus described Goiswinth as a distraught mother, with whose emotions his audience was meant to empathise. And there are even parallels between Goiswinth's final speech in the poem and moving passages from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius's *Achilleid*, amongst others classical allusions, as observed by Judith W. George.[65] Fortunatus's poem stands at odds with Gregory's information, since Goiswinth's literary function within the work precludes the notion that she was a ruthless persecutor of the faithful, least of all her kin.[66]

Gregory followed his exaggerated description of Goiswinth's persecution with an equally unreliable account of the revolt of her stepson, Hermenegild, against her husband, Leovigild. In Gregory's telling, Hermenegild had been convinced by his wife, the persecuted Ingund, to convert to Catholicism, and as a result Hermenegild's Arian father Leovigild turned against him. The revolt ended badly with Hermenegild's capture, exile, and eventual execution, while Ingund became a prisoner of the Byzantines and died in North Africa, *en route* to Constantinople.[67] On the surface, it seems odd that Gregory failed to mention Goiswinth in the context of the revolt, especially since he interpreted it as a religiously motivated conflict between Catholics and Arians. John of Biclaro, however, gave a detail that might explain Gregory's omission: Goiswinth had been on Hermenegild's side.[68] This claim can be confirmed

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[64] Hist. 4.28. The reason for Fortunatus's silence about the murder has proved contentious. He may simply have been unsure about the details, as suggested by Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat, Poèmes, Tome III: Livres IX-XI, Appendice, In laudem sanctae Mariae* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2004), pp. xliii-xliv. Alternatively, he may have considered the subject too sensitive to mention; see Tardi, *Fortunat*, p. 108. On the other hand, Gregory's account may simply be a fabrication, as suggested by Meyer, *Gelegenheitsdichter*, p. 120.

[65] George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 98-99. See also Roberts, 'Venantius', pp. 303-304.

[66] There were plenty of other figures in Fortunatus's poem who could have expressed the essence of Goiswinth's sorrow, if he had wished to avoid casting the queen in a positive light, such as Galswinth's nurse, whom George described as having the literary function of a 'mother-substitute', *Latin Poet*, p. 98. There is no obvious means of dating this work, although an early date (one prior to Gregory's account) was favoured by Reydellet, *Venance*, pp. xxiii-xiv. For a later date, see Koebner, *Venantius*, p. 52.

[67] Hist. 5.38, 6.43, 8.28.

[68] John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 579, '*Hermenegildus factione Gosuinthae reginae tyrannidem assumens in Hispali civitate rebellione facta recluditur, et alias civitates atque castella secum contra patrem rebellare facit.*'

from other sources. [69] For example, Pope Gregory I remained unaware of Hermenegild's conversion, which occurred due to the work of Leander of Seville, until c. 585, even though he had met with Leander in 579, suggesting that the prince may not have converted until after the rebellion began. [70] Likewise, even though Gregory thought that the Catholic Miro, King of Galicia, had been Hermenegild's ally, he was probably actually allied with Leovigild. [71] Of course, Gregory may simply have been relying on confused sources for his account, and, whatever the case, his point was not to make Hermenegild into a martyr, since he explicitly stated that the prince had no justification for endeavouring to kill his father, even if he was a heretic. [72] But the point remains that his religiously inspired interpretation of the revolt had no room for mention of Goiswinth's involvement on Hermenegild's behalf.

Gregory's careful manipulation of his information is even more apparent in his account of the Byzantine Empress, Sophia, whose political prominence during her widowhood received his pasquinade. Sophia's husband, Emperor Justin II, died in 578, although he became incapacitated with bouts of insanity beginning in 572, after which Sophia exercised authority on his behalf. [73] However, in December of 574, a high court official named Tiberius acquired formal governmental oversight in Justin's stead,

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[69] On specific problems with Gregory's account, see Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', pp. 254-261; Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, pp. 47-49; id., 'Merida and Toledo, 550-585', in *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches*, ed. by Edward James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 189-219 (at pp. 215-217); Walter Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice: The Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald', *Traditio*, 13 (1957), 73-118; and Bernard Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War. A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568-586)* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1994), p. 201, n. 75. On Hermenegild's revolt more generally, see J. N. Hillgarth, 'Coins and Chronicles: Propaganda in Sixth-Century Spain and the Byzantine Background', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 15.4 (1966), 483-508; Stroheker, 'Leovigild', pp. 183-187; Hans Messmer, *Hispania – Idee und Gotenmythos* (Zürich: Fretz and Wasmuth, 1960), pp. 121-133; Schäferdiek, *Kirche*, pp. 140-157; and Thompson, *Goths*, pp. 64-73; and Franz Görres, 'Kritische Unterschungen über den Aufstand und des Martyrium und das westgothischen Königssohnes Hermenigild', *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*, 43 (1873), 3-109.
[70] Gregory I, *Dialogi*, ed. by A. de Voguë, *Grégoire le Grand: Les Dialogues* (Paris, 1978), 3.31.2.
[71] Hist. 6.43. See Collins, 'Merida', p. 216.
[72] Hist. 6.43. See Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', p. 260. In Hist. 3.28, Gregory borrowed a phrase from Proverbs 1:18 against the killing of a kinsman. Compare also his account of Chramn's revolt against his father in Hist. 4.20 to 2 Samuel 15-18, 2 Kings 18, and Psalm 79:15, 42:1. For the historiographic tradition that did see Hermenegild as a martyr, see Hillgarth, 'Coins', p. 499.
[73] On the date of Justin's death, see Bernard Bachrach and Jerome Kroll, 'Justin's Madness: Weak-mindedness or Organic Psychosis', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 48 (1993), 40-67; Ewald Kislinger, 'Der kranke Justin II. und die ärzliche Haftung bei Operation in Byzanz', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantistik*, 36 (1986), 39-44.

assuming the title of *caesar*.[74] Gregory had only bad things to say of the widowed empress. He presented Tiberius and Sophia as rivals, with Tiberius, *magnus et verus Christianus*, ruling with the consent of the *populi*, while the conniving Sophia clung to power as an *augusta*, for purely self-interested reasons.[75] Thus, when the 'skilful, strong, wise, and charitable' Tiberius tried to give a large portion of the treasury (*multa de thesauris*) to the poor, Sophia rebuked him for rashly squandering what had taken her many years to accumulate.[76] Gregory had Tiberius reply with the apt biblical quotation: 'Hoard your treasure in heaven, where neither rust nor moth lay waste, where thieves neither steal nor swindle.'[77] Gregory then added that Tiberius's generosity was rewarded by God, who provided for his every need, and who protected him from the loss of the empire, even though it had once been stolen (*olim adgressum imperium*), which was presumably a reference to Sophia's attempt to rule on behalf of her incapacitated husband.[78] Later, Tiberius thwarted her attempts to oust him from power, and in response he confiscated her wealth and placed her under a limited form of house arrest. By this time, Justin II had died, but Sophia was not content to live out

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[74] See Paul Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam*, 2 vols (Paris: Picard, 1956), I, 55-56; and Averil Cameron, 'An Emperor's Abdication', *Byzantinoslavica*, 37 (1976), 161-171.

[75] Hist. 5.19. On Gregory's presentation of Tiberius, see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 69; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 221-224; id., 'Conspicuously Absent: Martial Heroism in the Histories of Gregory of Tours and Its Likes', in *GoT*, pp. 365-393 (at p. 374); Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 48-54, 126-127; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 233-235, 249-254; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 2 (1968), 31-44 (at 34); Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 96-98; Averil Cameron, 'Early Byzantine Kaiserkritik: Two Case Histories', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 3 (1977), 1-17; and ead., 'The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 26 (1975), 421-426. The scholarship has tended to emphasis Tiberius's contrast to Justin II in the *Historiae*, rather than Sophia.

[76] Hist. 5.19, '...*utilem, strinuum atque saptientum*'; cf. John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by R. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1860), 3.14. On the fiscal polities of Justin and Sophia, see Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 43-44; and A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), I, 305-307. On the custom of benefaction and its relation to Christian feasts, see Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 195-201.

[77] Hist. 5.19, '*Thesaurizate vobis thesaurus in caedo, ubi neque erugo neque tinea corrumpit, et ubi fures non effodiunt nec furantur.*' Cf. Matthew 6:20.

[78] Hist. 5.30; cf. Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 3.11. Alternatively, Gregory's statement that Sophia once stole the empire may be an obscure reference to Justin's succession, which was accomplished by murdering a potential rival, apparently though Sophia's complicity; see John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 568; Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by E. Walford (London: Samuel Bagster and sons, 1846), 5.3; and Agathias, *Historiarum libri quinque*, ed. by Rudolf Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri quinque* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 4.22.

her widowhood in the relative opulence and political insignificance of the palatial confines. In 582, with the ailing Tiberius looking for a successor, she recommended Maurice, in the hopes that she could marry him and reacquire her share of imperial power. However, Tiberius outsmarted her again, arranging for his own daughter Constantina to marry Maurice just before his death.[79]

Gregory's account of Sophia is at odds with contemporaneous Byzantine texts on a number of points.[80] For example, although Gregory credited Tiberius's acquisition of the title *caesar* simply to the will of the *populi*, the eastern sources were more willing to admit other factors, including Sophia's agency. John of Ephesus wrote that the senate had cooperated with Sophia in making the decision, and that Justin himself had recovered from insanity long enough to consent.[81] Evagrius also attributed the decision to Justin, acting under Sophia's advice, and he made no mention of the senate or the people.[82] Gregory's presentation of Sophia and Tiberius as antagonistic rivals, therefore, is belied by the fact that Tiberius was actually Sophia's choice for *caesar*.[83] Furthermore, Sophia had been an important figure at court even before her husband Justin acquired the throne, and she remained his equal after his succession, a point supported by the imagery on the Byzantine coinage, art, and diplomatic material of the reign.[84] Her continued prominence after Justin's incapacitation, and subsequent death, was hardly the illegitimate and sudden grasp for power that Gregory's implied.

Of course, these details may have been unknown to Gregory, but there are reasons to believe that he was fairly well-informed about Byzantine affairs. He had ample opportunity to acquire information from the envoys that travelled between Constantinople and the Merovingian royal courts.[85] Indeed, Gregory's account of the

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[79] Hist. 6.30; cf. Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 2.15. On Tiberius's death on 14 August 582, see Goubert, *Byzance*, I, 31-32.

[80] For a reconstruction of Sophia's career based on the sources, see Averil Cameron, 'The Empress Sophia', *Byzantion*, 45 (1975), 5-21; and Garland, *Byzantine*, pp. 40-58. On the joint reign of Justin II and Sophia, see Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 218-227.

[81] John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.

[82] Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.13.

[83] On Tiberius as Sophia's choice, see Garland, *Byzantine*, p. 51; and Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), p. 68.

[84] Cameron, 'Empress', pp. 10-11; Garland, *Byzantine*, pp. 40-42, 47-51; James, *Empresses*, pp. 64, 68.

[85] Cameron, 'Byzantine Sources, p. 426; Godefroid Kurth, 'De l'autorité de Grégoire de Tours', in *Études franques*, II, 117-206 (at 167).

internal politics of the empire shares the same general point of view as that of Evagrius, who was Tiberius's *quaestor*, as well as the view of Tiberius's friend, John of Ephesus. Gregory's colleague Venantius Fortunatus was informed, enough at least to have had a copy of Corippus's poem on Justin and Sophia at his disposal.[86] And, lastly, the Eastern bishop Simon visited Tours in 591 and recounted the fall of Antioch and Apamea to the Persians in the early 570s, which had been the result of Justin and Sophia's decision to cease payments to the rival empire.[87]

In view of this, Gregory's failure to mention certain positive aspects of Sophia's rule seems conspicuous. For example, Sophia had converted from Monophysitism to orthodoxy, and she subsequently worked to bring other Monophysites into the Church, which is the sort of thing that Gregory normally praised.[88] Likewise, in 567 she summoned the moneylenders of Constantinople and absolved all outstanding debts, to the joy of the general population.[89] A more significant oversight concerns Radegund's acquisition of relics of the True Cross for her monastery of Sainte-Croix in 567-569, which Gregory mentioned twice, without ever crediting Justin and Sophia as the benefactors.[90] The imperial contribution was no secret in Gaul, and Fortunatus had no problems recognising Sophia as not only the generous benefactor of the relics, but also as a pious ruler and frequenter of holy sites.[91] Fortunatus also compared Sophia with St. Helena, the famous empress and mother of Constantine who was believed to have discovered the True Cross in the fourth century.[92] Gregory had explicitly mentioned

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[86] Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II' in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), pp. 51-67. (at p. 61).

[87] Hist. 4.41, 10.24. On Justin and Sophia ending payments to Persia, see Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.1, 5.8, 5.9; and John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.20. Gregory mentioned this himself in Hist. 4.40.

[88] John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.10-12. On Sophia's conversion, see Garland, *Byzantine*, pp. 44-47.

[89] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, trans. by Cyril Mango et al., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), anno mundi 6060.

[90] Hist. 9.40; GM 5. For the context and date, see Cameron, 'Early Religious'; and Bachrach, *Anatomy*, pp. 21-25.

[91] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix 2. On the poem, see Cameron, 'Early Religious', pp. 58-59; and Brennan, 'Venantius', pp. 12-13. On Sophia's piety and almsgiving, see Carolyn Conner, *Women of Byzantium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 132-133.

[92] On the discovery of the Cross, see Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. by Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 1-4, 23-53; Jan Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of the Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 81-93; Stephan Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross was Found:*

Helena's role in recovering the Cross, and the nails of Christ's passion, but without drawing the obvious parallel with Sophia, even though he followed his account of Helena with a mention of Sophia's promotion of a particular official within the court of Constantinople.[93] Rather than compare Helena to Sophia, Gregory compared Helena to Radegund, the saintly recipient of the relics.[94]

In a less obvious manoeuvre, Gregory also decided to closely associate the imagery of the cross with Sophia's rival, Tiberius. Gregory recounted how the *caesar* was walking through the imperial palace one day when he noticed the Lord's cross (*crux dominica*) inscribed upon a marble tile. He ordered the tile removed and, after some pious exclamations and the discovery of two more such tiles, a hoard of coins was uncovered, which Tiberius naturally used for the relief of the poor. It is tempting to believe that Gregory included this story in order to identify the Cross with Tiberius in the minds of his Gallic audience, which might otherwise have been inclined to associate the image with Sophia. Moreover, Gregory may have had a similar goal in mind when he lauded Tiberius with the accolade of 'wise' (*sapiens*), since Sophia's name meant 'wisdom' in Greek.[95] Gregory was not the only one to play on the etymological meaning of Sophia's name: Corippus had called attention to it by referring to the empress as *sapientia*, and the same wordplay was used in certain epigrams from her reign.[96] Of course, Gregory's application of the accolade might have been merely coincidental, but, regardless of this, it is clear that his overall account of

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From Event to Medieval Legend (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1991); and Stefan Heid, 'Der Ursprung der Helena-Legende im Pilgerbetrieb Jerusalems', *Jahrbuch in Antike und Christentum*, 32 (1989), 41-71.

[93] GM 6. On Helena as an image of the model empress, see Leslie Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (London: Rutledge, 1997), pp. 52-75; Jo Ann McNamara, 'Imitatio Helenae: Sainthood as an Attribute of Queenship', in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. by Sandro Sticca (New York, 1996), pp. 51-80; Merta, 'Helena'; and James, *Empresses*, pp. 11-16. James also mentioned the qualities of a stereotypical bad empress on pp. 16-20 and in her, 'Goddess, Whore, Wife, or Slave? Will the Real Byzantine Empress Please Stand Up?', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 123-140.

[94] GM 5; cf. Hist. 1.36. See Merta, 'Helena', pp. 8-9. On Gregory's use of Radegund as an exemplar of the pious queen, see Sylvie Joye, 'Basine, Radegonde et la Thuringie chez Grégoire de Tours', *Francia*, 32.1 (2005), 1-18.

[95] Hist. 5.19.

[96] Corippus, *In laudem Justini Augusti minoris. Eloge de l'empereur Justin II*, ed. by Serge Antès (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1981), 1-2. See Cameron, 'Empress Sophia', p. 11; and Garland, *Byzantine*, pp. 41-42.

Sophia was carefully constructed in order to tarnish the empress's image. In this way, Gregory's presentation of her is similar to the other widows who attempted to stay politically relevant after their husbands' deaths (or, in her case, mental incapacitation and then death). In making his moral point, Gregory drew upon historical information, but not so faithfully that he ended up contradicting himself on the matter of how a woman should behave upon becoming a widow.

Good Widows: Ultrogotha, Ingoberg, and Chlothild

Not every royal widow faired badly in Gregory's works, since there were some who dedicated themselves to worshipping God without distraction in their widowhood. Ultrogotha, for example, was granted a chapter describing her devotion to Martin's relics in the *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, where Gregory wrote that the widowed queen fasted, kept vigils through the night, and refused to approach Martin's tomb out of humility.[97] She was the image of the saintly widow, and, like Armentaria, she was rewarded with the sight of a miracle, when she witnessed three blind men being cured. In Gregory's telling, Ultrogotha had spent her widowhood wholly detached from political affairs, since her late husband's successor, Chlothar I, had banished her and her daughters from the kingdom.[98] Gregory failed to mention, however, that Ultrogotha had been recalled from banishment by King Charibert after Chlothar's death, and that Charibert had placed her and her daughters under his protection.[99] This information is known from a panegyric composed by Venantius Fortunatus for the king, probably for his ceremonial *adventus*, which would have presumably included Ultrogotha.[100] Fortunatus's poem hints that her position at Childebert's court was more than inconsequential, since the king gave her an opulent garden next to the church of St. Vincent in Paris, which served as his royal mausoleum, and in which she, too, was

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[97] VM 1.12.

[98] Hist. 4.20.

[99] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 6.2.

[100] George, *Personal*, pp. 34-35, nn. 48-49, 54-55. On the poem, see George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 43-48. On the royal and imperial *adventus*, see Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 37-44; Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 331-333; and Sabine MacCormak, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 40-42.

later buried.[101] This is not to suggest, of course, that Gregory invented Ultrogotha's pious reputation, which is clear from other sources.[102] But one might reasonably suspect that he passed over her continued political relevance, whatever this may have been, because he viewed it as an inconvenient contrast to her saintly deeds.

The constraints of Gregory's themes on widowhood may also explain why he passed over Ingoberg and her daughter Bertha's involvement in the Christianisation of Kent. Ingoberg had been married to King Charibert, who died in 567, and, according to Gregory, she developed a reputation as 'a very prudent woman, especially gifted for the religious life, diligent in her vigils, prayers, and almsgiving.'[103] In language suggestive of sanctity, Gregory wrote that, in 589, Ingoberg had been forewarned of her impending death by divine revelation, and that, as a result, she had asked him for help in drafting her will ahead of time.[104] Gregory praised the widowed queen for leaving a large sum to the cathedral of Tours and St. Martin's church, along with the cathedral of Le Mans. Curiously, on the two occasions when Gregory mentioned Ingoberg, he remarked, rather vaguely, that she had a daughter who was married to the son of a king in Kent. This unnamed daughter was, in fact, the well-known Bertha, wife and queen of Æthelberht – the Anglo-Saxon ruler who famously converted from paganism to Catholicism.[105] Although Æthelberht's accession to the throne, and his

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[101] Fortunatus, *Carmina* 6.6. On the church, see George, *Personal*, p. 51, n. 108; and ead., *Latin Poet*, p. 102, n. 85. On Chlothild's relics, see Godefroid Kurth, *Sainte Clotilde* (Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1905), pp. 181-183.

[102] Her charity can been seen in the decrees of the Council of Orléans V (549), preface and canon 15, which consented to her founding of a hostel (*xenodochium*) in Lyons. A diptych indicates that the monks of St. Peter in Arles, which Ultrogotha had founded, prayed for her during the liturgy. The contents of the diptych are listed after the *Regula ad Monachos* of Aurelianus, Bishop of Arles, under the title *Ex diptychis ejusdem monasterii*, in *PL*, 68. On this see, Hen, *Culture*, pp. 48-49, 90. Ultrogotha was also remembered as an image of the saintly queen in *Vita sanctae Balthildis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888), 18. However, she was mentioned, though not by name, as a wicked and politically involved queen in the *Vita sancti Samsonis episcopi Dolensis*, ed. by Pierre Flobert, *La vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol* (Paris: CNRS, 1997). See Wood, 'Forgery', pp. 380-384.

[103] Hist. 9.26, '*mulier valde cauta ac vitae religiosae praedita, vigiliis et orationibus atque elymosinis non ignava.*'

[104] On the hagiographic overtones, see Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 175-176.

[105] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. by Charles Plummer, *Venerablis Baedae Opera Historica*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1896), 1.25-26, 2.3, 2.5. On Æthelberht's conversion, see Ian Wood, 'Some Historical Reidentifications and the Christianization of Kent', in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. by id. and Guyda Armstrong (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 27-23; id., 'Augustine in Gaul', in *St. Augustine and the Conversion of England*, ed. by Richard Gameson (Thrupp: Sutton, 1999), pp. 68-82; id., 'Augustine's Journey', *Canterbury cathedral Chronicle*, 92

official conversion via baptism, took place after Gregory composed his passages on Ingoberg, there were certainly important earlier developments involving both Bertha and her mother that Gregory declined to discuss.[106]

One might reasonably assume that Æthelberht had been considering conversion to Christianity at least from the time of his marriage to Bertha, especially since she had a bishop in her entourage, and since the king gave her use of an ancient church in Kent.[107] Unfortunately, the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede was rather uninterested in Bertha's activity, and his account minimised the role that the Merovingians had in securing Æthelberht's conversion, since he wished to credit the mission headed by Augustine, which was sent from Rome in 596 and arrived in 597, with the conversion. But there are hints of Bertha's persuasive influence upon her unbelieving husband prior to this mission, such as in the statement made by Pope Gregory I in his *Moralia in Job*, written c. 595, that the conversion in Britain was already well underway.[108] Significantly, Bertha's church in Kent was dedicated to St. Martin,

(1998), 28-44; id., 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 1-17; id., 'Merovingian Hegemony in England', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Martin H. O. Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), pp. 235-241; id., *The Merovingian North Sea* (Alingsås: Viktoria Bokforlag, 1983); Rob Meens, 'A Background to Augustine's Mission to Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 5-17; R. A. Markus, 'Gregory the Great and Papal Missionary Strategy', *Studies in Church History*, 6 (1990), 29-38; id., 'The Chronology of the Gregorian Mission to England: Bede's Narrative and Gregory's Correspondence', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14 (1963), 16-30; Annethe Lohaus, *Die Merowinger und England* (Munich: Arebo-Gesellschaft, 1974), pp. 5-24. Gregory's silence regarding the Anglo-Saxons is discussed in Barbara Yorke, 'Gregory of Tours and Sixth-Century Anglo-Saxon England', in *GoT*, pp. 113-130.

[106] Book 9 of the *Historiae*, in which Ingoberg made her final appearance, dates to c. 590. On Æthelberht's accession to the throne as *post* 589, see Wood, 'Mission, pp. 10-11; id., *Merovingian North*, p. 16; Nicholas Brooks, 'The Creation and Early Structure of the Kingdom of Kent', in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), pp. 55-74 (at pp. 65-67); and David Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991), p. 34. Æthelberht's official conversion occurred after he received the mission of Augustine, which had been sent to Kent from Rome by Pope Gregory I in 596. A statement found in the epistolary correspondence of Pope Gregory I, referencing the conversion of ten-thousand pagans to Christianity on Christmas Day, 587, has been taken as evidence that Æthelberht was baptised in this year, although this evidence is far from definitive; see Wood, 'Mission, pp. 11-12; Kirby, *Earliest*, p. 32; Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), p. 6; and Jeffery Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 247-248. The statement is found in Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, ed. by Paul Ewald and Ludwig M. Hartmann, *MGH Epistolae*, 1-2 (Berlin, 1891-1899), 8.29.

[107] Wood, 'Mission', p. 11; id., 'Augustine in Gaul', p. 71.

[108] Gregory I, *Moralia in Job*, ed. by M. Adrien, *CCSL*, 143B (Turnhout, 1985), 27.11(21). See Wood, 'Mission', p. 2; and Richards, *Consul*, pp. 238-246.

the quintessential Merovingian patron saint. Although Bede thought that the dedication went back to Roman times, it seems more likely that it was the work of Bertha's bishop, Liudhard (assuming that the dedication happened before Bertha and Liudhard died).[109] Similarly, when Bertha died, she was buried in a chapel dedicated to St. Martin in the church of Peter and Paul, Canterbury.[110] Bertha's apparent promotion of the cult of Martin, whose principal shrine was in Tours, makes Gregory's silence all the more conspicuous, especially given the presence of her mother, Ingoberg, in Gregory's city.[111] Indeed, if one assumes that Bertha had relics of Martin installed in her church and chapel in Kent, as was customary, then her most obvious source for these relics was Martin's shrine in Tours.[112] Such a generous gift on Gregory's part might explain Ingoberg's decision to leave money to the shrine and cathedral in Tours in her will. It might also explain why, on the two occasions when Gregory mentioned Ingoberg in his works, he felt the need to reference Bertha's presence in Kent, which would otherwise seem quite unrelated to the context of each passage.[113]

Perhaps Gregory left out the details concerning Bertha's activity, such as the fact that her husband was pagan, because he was unwilling to highlight Ingoberg's involvement in arranging her daughter's marriage according to political concerns, without regard for the groom's religious beliefs. In the Merovingian kingdoms, widows had legal authority over their children, including the responsibility of securing marriages.[114] Bede wrote that Bertha had been sent to Æthelberht *a parentibus*, usually translated as 'by her parents' (but which could also be rendered as 'by her kin'); however, it seems unlikely that the betrothal could have occurred while Bertha's father, Charibert, was still alive.[115] This is because Charibert died in 567, while Æthelberht was probably not old enough to marry the princess until at least the early

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[109] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.26.

[110] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2.5.

[111] Wood, 'Augustine in Gaul', p. 72.

[112] See Martin Werner, 'The Liudhard Medalet', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), 27-42 (at 33). Although relics were not required for the consecration of a church until the Seventh Council of Nicaea in 787, the practice was common before, and Gregory himself took the effort to have relics of St. Martin, as well as other saints, installed in an oratory that he created in Tours within a year of his becoming bishop of the city (GC 20). On the use of relics in altars, see Crook, *Architectural*, pp. 12-14, 24-26.

[113] Cf. Wood, 'Augustine in Gaul', p. 72.

[114] On widows and guardianship, see Wemple, *Women*, p. 61 and n. 61; and Arjava, *Women*, pp. 89-94.

[115] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.25.

570s. Æthelberht died in 616; for him to have been older than 13 in 567, and thus of marriageable age prior to Charibert's death, he would have needed to have lived to an age greater than 62, which is of course possible but unlikely. Bede, who was removed from these events by a century and a half, was surely in error when he wrote that Æthelberht had enjoyed the improbably long reign of 56 years, i.e. since 561, especially since Gregory indicated that Æthelberht was still only a prince in 589, not a king.[116] If Bede's information has any factual basis, it may be that Æthelberht had lived, rather than ruled, for 56 years, which would place his birth in 561, and which would fit well with the overall chronology.[117] This argument, of course, is not intended to suggest that the widowed Ingoberg would have been able to arrange the marriage of her daughter by herself, without the involvement of the rulers of Gaul. But, considering that the fatherless Bertha was probably not a particularly valuable political asset in the 570s, and that the Anglo-Saxons were only minor players in the world of Merovingian politics, it is reasonable to believe that Ingoberg played a prominent role in lobbying the royal court to secure a marriage of her daughter, and in supporting Bertha's subsequent activity in Kent.[118] This would at least explain Gregory's curious silence on the matter, since he had little interest in mentioning that the otherwise saintly widow had pushed for her daughter to be married to a petty pagan prince across the Channel.

Gregory faced a much more complex challenge in his presentation of Queen Chlothild's widowhood, since he could not simply omit her political involvement in his efforts to affirm her as a positive example. As the wife of Clovis, who was the patriarch of the Merovingian ruling house, and as the mother of his successors,

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[116] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 2.5; Hist. 9.26. See Wood, 'Mission', pp. 10-11; id., 'Augustine in Gaul', p. 71; id., *Merovingian North Sea*, p. 16; Brooks, 'Creation', pp. 65-67; and Kirby, *Earliest*, p. 34. Against this interpretation, see Kai Peter Hilchenbach, *Das vierte Buch der Historien von Gregor von Tours. Edition mit sprachwissenschaftlichen-textkritischem und historischem Kommentar*, 2 vols (Bern: Lang, 2009), II, 534-535, n. 201. There is no reason to follow Hilchenbach's working assumption that Bertha was younger than her husband. Bertha's age is obscure, but the vague chronology available does not stand in opposition to the view that she was married after 567. Her mother Ingoberg had been born c. 520 (Hist. 9.26). If one guesses that Ingoberg had given birth to Bertha when she was around the age of 25, and that Bertha had been married when she was around the age of 25, then one would arrive at the very rough date of c. 570.

[117] Brooks, *Early*, p. 6. Alternatively, Bede may have confused the start of Charibert's reign in 561 with that of Æthelberht; see Wood, 'Mission', p. 11. Finally, if one adds together the reigns of Bertha's father and grandfather (Charibert and Chlothar), the sum is also 56.

[118] On the relatively low political value of Bertha, and the inferior position of the Anglo-Saxons, see Wood, 'Augustine in Gaul', p. 71; and id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 176-180.

Chlothild's lifelong political involvement was well known, including some rather unflattering incidents. Equally well known was her reputation for piety, not only because she had been instrumental in her husband's conversion, but also because of her charitable work in Tours, which she undertook throughout her widowhood, until her death in 544. Gregory's solution to the challenge presented by this material was to segregate her activities. Her secular involvement took place only during the first part of her widowhood, and, although detrimental, it was unable to ruin her legacy, which was redeemed by her later and nobler endeavours. To further this presentation, Gregory constructed a watershed moment, after which Chlothild turned her back on worldly affairs and lived out her final years in penitent good works. Thus, Gregory's account of Chlothild ultimately conformed to his overall theme on widowhood, allowing the queen to be ranked alongside the likes of Ingoberg and Ultrogotha, though achieving this presentation required a more sophisticated level of literary skill than was required by the previous examples.

Gregory began his account of Chlothild's widowhood, after he described the death of her husband in 511, with a pair of unflattering incidents, the first concerning the war waged by Chlothild's sons – Chlodomer, Childebert, and Chlothar – against her homeland of Burgundy in 523.[119] In a passage of dubious historicity, Gregory wrote that Chlothild had instigated the campaign, urging her children to seek revenge upon the brothers Godomar and Sigismund, since their father, Gundobad, had put her parents to death years previously.[120] Gregory's account stressed the negative aspects of the conflict, such as when Chlodomer captured Sigismund and then, against the prophetic admonitions of Avitus of Micy, ordered him and his family to be slain and their bodies to be thrown down a well in Saint-Péravy-la-Colombe. As a result, Chlodomer received a just retribution – he was killed in battle, decapitated, and his head was impaled on a pike, while Chlothild languished in her grief at the death of her

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[119] On the date of Clovis's death, see Wilhelm Levison, 'Zur Geschichte des Frankenkönigs Chlodovech', reprinted in *Aus rheinscher und fränkischer Frühzeit. Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1948), pp. 204-209; and Margarete Weidemann, 'Zur Chronologie der Merowinger im 6. Jahrhundert', *Francia*, 10 (1982), 471-513 (at pp. 481-482). For an analysis of Chlothild's life after Clovis's death, see Michel Rouche, *Clovis* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), pp. 349-374; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 180-181, 195-196.

[120] Hist. 2.28, 3.6; also Fredegar 3.17, who added a few details to Gregory's account.

son.[121] In his *Liber in gloria martyrum*, Gregory gave a brief hagiographic account of Sigismund, including his ability to work posthumous miracles, implying that his murder at Chlodomer's hands was something of a martyrdom.[122] Indeed, Gregory put so much emphasis on Chlodomer's death and Chlothild's lamentations that one might almost miss the fact that the Merovingians were ultimately victorious in this conflict – a point demonstrated by comparison to the account found in the *Liber historiae Francorum*, which did not miss the opportunity to revel in the glorious victory.[123] Gregory was clearly concerned to show that Chlothild's desire for revenge had backfired, and that her involvement in politics had brought her only tragedy.　·

Of the various aspects of Gregory's account that are curious, none is more so than his decision to characterise the campaign as inspired by Chlothild's desire for vengeance against the Burgundian house. Not only had her parents been slain in the 490s, i.e. three decades before her sons invaded Burgundy in 523, which would be a long time to hold a grudge, but also, when Gregory recounted Clovis's campaign against Burgundy in 500, he failed to attribute this attack to Chlothild's longing for retribution.[124] Moreover, Gregory's narrative of Chlodomer's retributive murder of Sigismund shares remarkable parallels with his account of the original murder of Chlothild's father by Gundobad, and this suggests a degree of creative licence on his part.[125] Indeed, Gundobad may not even have been responsible for the murder of Chlothild's parents in the first place. Although Gregory stated that Chlothild's father, a Burgundian king named Chilperic, had been Gundobad's brother, it may be better to identify him with Gundobad's uncle, who was also a Burgundian king named

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[121] Hist. 3.6.

[122] GM 74. See Frederick Paxton, 'Power and the Power to Heal: The Cult of St. Sigismund of Burgundy', *EME*, 2 (1993), 95-110 (at 97).

[123] LHF 20-21.

[124] See Ian Wood, 'Clermont and Burgundy: 511-534', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 32 (1988), 119-125 (at pp. 122-125); id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 43; id., 'Gregory and Clovis', 253; and Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991). For an interpretation accepting vengeance as the principal motivation for the campaign, see Stephen White, 'Clotild's Revenge: Politics, Kinship, and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud', in *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living*, ed. by Samuel Cohn and Steven Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 107-130. On the date of Clovis's campaign against Burgundy, described in Hist. 2.32-33, see Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 500. Marius was doubted on this point by Godefroid Kurth, *Histoire poétique des Mérovingiens* (Paris: Picard, 1893), pp. 247-248.

[125] Merta, 'Helena', p. 5 and n. 12.; Georges Tessier, *Le Baptême de Clovis: 25 décembre 496 (?)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 177; and Kurth, *Histoire*, pp. 245-247.

Chilperic.[126] The fraternal Chilperic is known only from Gregory's one remark, written a century after the events, while the avuncular Chilperic has contemporary attestation.[127] Gundobad's uncle Chilperic seems to have died a natural death.[128]

Even if one accepts the existence of two Chilperics, and thus Gregory's statement that Chlothild's father had been the brother of Gundobad, there remains a problem arising from a statement made by Avitus of Vienne, who wrote that Gundobad had wept over the death of his brothers.[129] This remark is difficult to reconcile with the idea that he had murdered one of them, and, moreover, Avitus did not even mention Chlothild in this context. The confusion may not have originated with Gregory, who was relying on other sources, presumably written sources, for his account of the Burgundian royal house, as well as Chlothild's involvement in the campaign against Burgundy in 523. Writing two generations removed from this campaign, and the annexation of Burgundy that occurred a decade later, Gregory may have been drawing upon established traditions, which had come to see Chlothild's involvement as a that of an avenger, in order to appropriate the legacy of the former Burgundian princess for the Merovingian cause.[130] Gregory's original contribution, however, is surely to be found in his emphasis on the futility of Chlothild's continued political involvement during her widowhood.

This same theme is at work in Gregory's account of the second disparaging incident of Chlothild's widowhood, which occurred after she gained guardianship over her three grandchildren – Theudoald, Gunthar, and Chlodoald – following Chlodomer's death.[131] In Gregory's telling, her son Childebert noticed that she gave all of her affection to these grandchildren, and he began to worry that they would inherit the kingdom. Childebert colluded with his brother Chlothar, took possession of the grandchildren, and issued Chlothild an ultimatum: they would either have their royal

[126] This argument appears in Danuta Shanzer, 'Marriage and Kinship Relations among the Burgundians', (forthcoming). I would like to thank Dr. Shanzer for kindly allowing me to consult a draft version of this article.

[127] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae et Carmina*, ed. by André Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960-1970), *Epistulae*, 5.6.2.

[128] Avitus of Vienne, *Opera quae supersunt*, ed. by Rudolf Peiper, MGH AA, 6.2 (Berlin, 1883), *Epistulae*, 5. This point has also been derived from Shanzer, 'Marriage and Kinship'.

[129] Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 5.

[130] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 43.

[131] Hist. 3.6.

locks cut, stripping them of their dignity and political significance, or they would be executed.[132] Chlothild replied, 'if they cannot gain the kingdom, then I would rather see them slain than shorn,' and so Theudoald and Gunthar were put to death, although Chlodoald escaped.[133] Gregory added that Chlothild had acted *ignorans in ipso dolore*, since the thought of seeing her grandchildren disgraced and excluded from succession had destroyed her former hope, 'I will not feel like I have lost a son, if I see you [grandchildren] reigning in his stead.'[134] Chlothild's grief as a mother might have mitigated her culpability in ordering the deaths of her grandchildren, except that, as Gregory noted, she had ultimately been responsible for her son Chlodomer's death in the first place. Indeed, Gregory had little interest in justifying Chlothild's decision to remain involved in Merovingian politics. Instead, he presented the death of her grandchildren as a turning point in her life, after which she dedicated herself to pious endeavours, undertaken in a spirit of penitence.

Gregory described how, thenceforth, Chlothild was so tireless in her almsgiving, so eager in keeping vigils, so perfect in her chastity, and so generous in donating estates to the church that she became regarded, 'not as a queen, but as a special handmaid of God'.[135] Tellingly, Gregory wrote: 'She was not taken down toward ruination by the kingdom of her sons, or worldly ambition (*ambitio saeculi*), or by wealth; instead she was taken up toward grace by her humility.'[136] In this way, she was rather like the grandson who escaped her reprobation: Chlodoald, who responded to the tragedy by renouncing the world of secular politics (*postpositum regnum terrenum*), and devoting himself to religious pursuits, becoming a priest and, eventually, a saint.[137] Chlothild's reformed approach is evident in Gregory's account of

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[132] On the point that sheering, in this context, represents a loss of royal power, rather than a threat of forced monastic tonsure or scalping, see Max Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms', in *Construction*, pp. 173-212 (at pp. 190-191). Diesenberger also dispelled the notion that long hair was an element of sacral kingship. On this point, see also Ian Wood, 'Deconstructing the Merovingian Family', in *Construction*, pp. 149-171 (at pp. 149-155); and A. C. Murray, 'Post vocantur Merohingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship'', in *After Rome*, pp. 121-152.

[133] Hist. 3.18, '*Satius mihi enim est, si ad regnum non ereguntur, mortuos eos videre quam tonsus.*'

[134] Hist. 3.18, '*Non me puto amisisse filium, si vos videam in eius regno substitui.*'

[135] Hist. 3.18, '*Non regina, sed propria Dei ancilla.*'

[136] Hist. 3.18, '*...non regnum filiorum, non ambitio saeculi nec facultas extulit ad ruinam, sed humilitas evexit ad gratiam.*'

[137] Hist. 3.10. In copying Gregory's passage, Fredegar added that posthumous miracles occurred at Chlodoald's tomb (3.38). A Carolingian *vita* also exists on Chlodoald.

her response to the civil war subsequently waged between her sons. The widowed queen turned to the power of St. Martin, rather than her worldly influence, to prevent the conflict by keeping vigils at his tomb in Tours. As a result, when her son and stepson, Childebert and Theudebert, advanced upon her son Chlothar's fortified position, a sudden tempest unleashed a barrage of hail upon their encampment, causing the kings to repent and cease the campaign. 'Let no man be in doubt that this occurred by the power of St. Martin working through the intercession of the queen,' Gregory affirmed, punctuating his account of Chlothild's intervention.[138]

Gregory concluded his discussion by stating that the queen had died *plena dierum bonsique* and had been taken from Tours to Paris, to be buried next to her husband and children in the church of the Holy Apostles, which she had helped to construct.[139] His comment regarding the transfer of her remains *cum magno psallentio* is suggestive of the translation of a saint's relics, and her interment next to St. Geneviève, whose cult she had promoted, furthered her aura of holiness.[140] There may be something more to Gregory's distinction between Chlothild's activities in Tours and Paris. Earlier, when Gregory first mentioned the death of Chlothild's husband, he wrote that she 'came to Tours, to the church of St. Martin, where she remained all her days, except for the rare visit to Paris, living with the highest purity and benevolence.'[141] Gregory was clear that Chlothild's reprobation of her grandchildren had occurred during one of those rare visits to Paris, and one might assume that she had also instructed Chlodomer to seek revenge against Burgundy while visiting the Merovingian capital. If so, then Gregory separated Chlothild's noble and reprehensible acts spatially, by disassociating her political involvement from her residence in Tours,

[138] Hist. 3.28, '*Quod nullus ambigat, hanc per obtentum reginae beati Martini fuisse virtutem.*' See de Nie, *Views*, pp. 105-106.

[139] Hist. 4.1. On the church of the Holy Apostles, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 206-208. On Chlothild's possible role in its construction, see Godefroid Kurth, 'Étude critique sur la vie de sainte Geneviève', *Revue d'histoire écclésiastique*, 14 (1913), 9-16.

[140] On Chlothild's promotion of the cult of Geneviève, see Martin Heinzelmann and Joseph-Claude Poulin, *Les Vies anciennes de sainte Geneviève de Paris: Études critiques* (Paris: H. Champion, 1986), p. 53. On the translation of the relics of royalty, and its relationship with the royal *adventus* ceremony, see Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, pp. 66-77; Peter Willmes, *Der Herrscher-"Adventus" im Kloster des Frühmittelalters* (Munich, 1976); and Nikolaus Gussone, "Adventus-Zeremoniell und Translation von Reliquien: Vitricius von Rouen, De laude sanctorum', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 10 (1976), 125-133.

[141] Hist. 2.43, '...*Turonus venit ibique ad basilica beati Martini deserviens, cum summa pudititia atque benignitate in hoc loco commorata est omnibus diebus vitae suae, raro Parisius visitans.*'

in addition to the temporal separation created by the watershed moment of her repentance. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate that the translation of Chlothild's remains, as recounted in Gregory's narrative, was intended to sanctify her legacy in Paris, in the same manner that her conversion from worldly activity redeemed her earlier misdeeds. Whatever the case, it can be said that, for the remainder of the *Historiae* and elsewhere in Gregory's works, Chlothild's sanctity was secure, and her occasional appearances in his narrative were always in reference to her benefaction of the Church.[142]

Historically, it is doubtful that Chlothild's activities can be so neatly segregated. For example, she had been involved in the appointment of three Bishops of Tours, which could be interpreted in terms of both religious and political agency, and these appointments spanned both sides of the 524 date and its watershed significance in Gregory's narrative.[143] Therefore, it is perhaps best to see the separation of events in Chlothild's life as one of Gregory's literary strategies, which he employed in order to assemble the different traditions about the queen into a coherent narrative consistent with his overall themes, including those of widowhood and holiness, in view of the contemporary knowledge and expectations of his audience. As a Bishop of Tours, Gregory may have felt a certain obligation to uphold the sanctity of the queen who had resided in the city from 511 to 544, and who presumably left her mark on the local consciousness of the city. Likewise, he had to address whatever other traditions existed in his day about Chlothild's involvement in the Burgundian wars, and the ill fate of Chlodomer's sons. Gregory did not have the luxury of the Carolingian author of the *Vita sanctae Chrothildis*, who was able to expunge such details about the queen, which no one in the ninth century wished to remember.[144] Gregory's account of Chlothild highlights the skilful manner in which he manipulated his information, without

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[142] Chlothild granted the priest Anastasius land (Hist. 4.12), appointed three bishops of Tours (Hist. 10.31), and acted as the patroness of a man who performed well in his religious duties (VM 1.7).

[143] Hist. 10.31; cf. 3.2, 3.17. The chronology of the tenures of these three bishops, Theodorus, Proculus, and Dinifius, is difficult to reconstruct, because Gregory gave conflicting information about their order of succession, but the beginning of Dinifius's episcopate can be dated prior to 524; see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 201.

[144] *Vita sanctae Chrothildis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM, 2 (Hannover, 1888), 9-10. On the construction of Chlothild's sanctity in this text, see Claire Thiellet, 'La sainteté royale de Clotilde', in *Clovis*, I, 147-155.

resorting to the crude tactic of fabrication, or, in this case, the convenience of omission.[145]

The Blessing of Widows

Although Gregory's particular interest in the moral conduct of widows may be explained, in part, by reference to his relationship with his mother, this should not be emphasised to the exclusion of other influences. One can readily detect biblical overtones in Gregory's language, for example, and he was clearly influenced by the story of the poor widow in the Gospels, which he referenced twice in his works.[146] Gregory may even have commissioned this scene to be painted above the western entrance of St. Martin's church in Tours, during his refurbishment of the shrine following a fire, since the image is known to have adorned the wall at a somewhat later date.[147] Gregory may also have been influenced by Merovingian canonical legislation, which provided a liturgical blessing for women who wished to sanctify their widowhood.[148] This rite had its origins in the order of widows, which existed in Christian antiquity, and which was closely related to the order of deaconesses.[149] Although Merovingian councils rejected the order of widows and deaconesses, they did allow widows to receive a *benedictio paenitentiae*, and this may have had a formative

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[145] One cannot, therefore, ascertain Chlothild's character by simply stripping away Gregory's trimmings of praise to reveal a queen with a 'mentalité barbare', as was attempted by Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Clovis, le païen, Clotilde, la pieuse. A propos de la mentalité barbare', in *Clovis*, I, 349-367.

[146] VM 1.31; GM 96; cf. Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

[147] Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 308-310, 313; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 381-390, 800-812. This is indicated by the *Martinellus*, an appendix attached to some manuscripts of the works of Sulpicius Severus, see Edmond Frédéric le Blant, *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1856-1865), I, 234-235, nr 173. On the manuscripts, see Jacques Fontaine, *Sulpice Sévère: Vie de saint Martin*, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967-1969), I, 215-224. This interpretation of Gregory's refurbishment (Hist. 10.31) depends on him having consistently used the word *ecclesia* to refer to the cathedral at Tours, and reserving the word *basilica* for St. Martin's church, which had been inadvertently set afire during Chramn's revolt (cf. Hist. 4.20); see Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 131 and n. 78.

[148] On the manner in which Merovingian conciliar legislation influenced Gregory's vision of a Christian society, see Mitchell, 'Saints', p. 84.

[149] On the order of widows and deaconesses, see Clarke, *This Female*, pp. 82-99, 205-211; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 171-176; Alexandre Faivre, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie: les premières étapes du cursus clérical* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), pp. 98-138; Roger Gryson, *Le Ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972), pp. 75-109, 174-175; Jean Daniélou, 'Le Ministère des femmes dans l'Église ancienne', *La Maison-Dieu*, 61 (1960), 70-96.

influence on Merovingian society, one which Gregory actively furthered in his own writings.

The orders of widows and deaconesses are two rather obscure aspects of the structure of the Church in antiquity, and at times it is impossible to distinguish between them. For example, the *Codex Theodosianus*, which was still circulating in sixth-century Gaul, seems to have treated the two as the same phenomenon. It stated that a woman could not become a deaconess unless she was sixty years old and had children in her household; if these children were under twenty five, then they were to be appointed guardians, which indicates that they had no living father.[150] The Burgundian Council of Épaone, convoked by Avitus of Vienne in 517, decreed that, 'the consecration of widows, who are called deaconesses, is to be abolished in all of our territories. In its place, they may receive the benediction of penitence (*benedictio paenitentiae*), if they seek to be converted (*si converti ambiunt*).'[151] Merovingian church legislation seems to have been inspired by the position of Épaone. For example, the Second Council of Orléans, held in 533, stated that it was uncanonical (*contra interdicta canonum*) for women to receive a benediction to the deaconate (*benedictio diaconatus*), and it excommunicated those women who had received this benediction and then subsequently resumed conjugal relations, perhaps a reference to remarried widows.[152] Likewise, the decree of Épaone abolishing the order of widows was cited by the Second Council of Tours, held in 567.[153] The issue of the *benedictio paenitentiae* does not appear in the promulgations of Orléans II and Tours II, but the Third Council of Orléans, held in 538, suggests that Épaone's decision to allow widows to receive this blessing was also accepted in Gaul. Under the heading *de paenitentum conversione*, Orléans III stated that the *benedictio paenitentiae* should not be given to the young, nor should it be given to the married, except with the consent of their spouse and at an advanced age (*aetas plena*).[154] Moreover, it decreed that anyone receiving this benediction who returned to

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[150] *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.2.27, citing 1 Timothy 5:9 in support.

[151] Épaone, 21, '*Viduarum consecrationem, quas diaconas vocitant, ab omni regione nostra penitus abrogamus, sola eis paenitentiae benedictione, si converti ambiunt, inponenda.*'

[152] Orléans II, 17-18.

[153] Tours II, 21(20). On this canon's use of biblical material, see Wood, 'Incest', pp. 294-295. On the sources used by Tours II in general, see Paul Mikat, *Die Inzestgesetzgebung der merowingisch-fränkischen Konzilien (511-626/7)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), pp. 41-127.

[154] Orléans III, 27(24).

secular pursuits (*ad saecularem habitum*) was to be excommunicated for life (*ad exitum*).[155]

The *benedictio paenitentiae* as practised in Gaul, therefore, seems to have been an umbrella category that could include widows but was not exclusive to them. Indeed, widows were one of the few groups that fit the criteria for the *benedictio* as articulated by Orléans III without difficulty. And although the Merovingian councils did not expressly connect the abrogation of the order of widows with the incorporation of widows into the congregation of professed penitents, the fluidity with which the Burgundian and Merovingian episcopates exchanged normative practices suggests continuity in this regard. The Council of Épaone itself, after all, had made use of Merovingian decrees from the First Council of Orléans, held in 511.[156] Even with the order of widows dissolved, therefore, it is possible to think of those widows who received the *benedictio paenitentiae* as constituting a specific group defined by a ritual of initiation. Moreover, the correlation between widowhood and penitence surely encouraged women to see the moment of their husband's deaths as an opportunity to shun the burdens and temptations of the world, and to devote themselves to pious pursuits.

It is perhaps in this context that Venantius Fortunatus's rather curious statement should be understood, when he wrote that, sometime in the 550s, Bishop Médard had consecrated Radegund as a deaconess when she sought to leave her husband, King Chlothar.[157] The order of deaconesses had long been abolished by this point, placing Fortunatus's statement in doubt. Perhaps Médard had drawn upon the continuity present in the *benedictio paenitentiae* in order to confer a special status upon Radegund, without suffering the spiritual and political consequences that he would have incurred had he fulfilled her original request to be consecrated as a nun (*monacha*), which was expressly prohibited by Tours II.[158] In other words, Médard may

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[155] Orléans III, 28(25).

[156] Orléans I, 18. See Catharine Peyroux, 'Canonists Construct the Nun?: Church Law and Women's Monastic Practice in Merovingian France', in *Law, Society*, pp. 242-255 (at p. 243 and n. 6).

[157] Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 12.

[158] Tours II, 21(20). This canon was derived from *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.25.2, which was originally an imperial enactment issued in the name of Jovian (363-364) shortly after his death. On Médard's decision as some sort of compromise, see Lynda Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp.

have sought to group Radegund with the other penitents, who had rejected the secular world, including those who no longer had a husband, by drawing upon the ambiguity present in the *benedictio paenitentiae*. Without necessarily nullifying Radegund's marriage, Médard placed her into a category of women who, in the words of Orléans III, could not return *ad saecularem habitum*. Under this admittedly speculative interpretation, Fortunatus's decision to apply the term 'deaconess' is better seen as a vague anachronism, mirroring the ambiguity in Médard's clever solution, rather than an outright historical error.

Gregory was certainly informed of the issue of widowhood, the ancient order of widows (as perceived in sixth-century Gaul), and the *benedictio paenitentiae*. Tours II had been held in his own diocese, while it was governed by Eufronius, who was one of his relatives.[159] Indeed, Eufronius was a grandson of Gregory of Langres, who had attended the Council of Épaone, and the familial connection between Eufronius and the elder Gregory may go a long way in explaining the incorporation of the Burgundian canons of Épaone into the Merovingian decrees of Tours II.[160] The younger Gregory, therefore, was perfectly positioned to both understand and promote the idea that widowhood represented a vocation akin to a conversion from the world. Naturally, this calls to mind Armentaria, who was of course also a relative a Gregory of Langres and Eufronius, the latter of whom may even have been her brother. Although this analysis has attempted to demonstrate the influences that inspired the views of Gregory of Tours on widowhood other than his mother Armentaria, it may be possible to tie them all back to her. Armentaria, after all, was surely as inspired by the biblical presentation of widowhood as her son was. Indeed, she may have been the first one to introduce this message to a young and impressionable Gregory of Tours. One naturally wonders if she herself had undergone the *benedictio paenitentiae*. Even if an answer to this specific point must remain elusive, it is possible to say that Armentaria, as presented in Gregory's works, lived out her widowhood in a manner wholly consistent

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131-132; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 98; Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 79, n. 108; Wemple, *Women*, pp. 136-143; and Étienne Delaruelle, 'Sainte Radegonde, son type de sainteté et la chrétienté de son temps', in *Études mérovingiennes* (Paris: Picard, 1953), pp. 65-74 (at p. 67).

[159] On Eufronius, see Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 170 (nr 130); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 204-205; Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 15-16 (nr 12); and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 204-246.

[160] See Wood, 'Incest', pp. 301-303.

with the spirit of the *benedictio* as it appeared in the conciliar legislation, which was accepted wholeheartedly by the clerical elite of Gregory's family.

Conclusion

Gregory carefully managed his material on widows, omitting, reshaping, or emphasising different events in order to present a consistent theme on widowhood. For certain individuals, such as Pelagia and Ultrogotha, this involved a rather straightforward process of passing over a few unhelpful details and stressing the many positive ones. For others, such as Sophia and Goiswinth, Gregory had to be more selective. It is not a coincidence that his highly complex portrait of Chlothild concerned a queen whose political dealings were as well known as her pious benefactions, although Gregory was at least aided by the fact that Chlothild was a figure of the past. Gregory also allowed his opinions about widowhood to influence his account of the most famous queen of his own day, Brunhild, who is the subject of an extended analysis in Chapters III and IV of this study. Yet it is sufficiently evident from the examples discussed here that Gregory had particular views on the proper conduct of widows, and that he arranged his narrative according to this theme. The death of a husband, in spite of its sorrowful nature, represented an opportunity to dedicate oneself to pious pursuits unhindered by the usual concerns that a woman faced this side of the afterlife.

At first sight, it might be surprising to find that Gregory paid such attention to issues of widowhood, and that these represent a major theme in his works. Gregory's relationship with his mother presents itself as one possible explanation. He put Armentaria forth as an exemplar of holiness, and it is by this standard that the other widows of his works were tacitly compared. It is to be expected that Armentaria had a formative influence upon her son, given that the boy's father died when he was still quite young, and this is evident in his interest in the interpretation of dreams, his veneration of relics, and even his decision to take up the pen. Of course, Gregory must have had other sources of inspiration, and his attitudes toward widowhood are consistent with both biblical models and conciliar legislation. To this extent, Gregory can be seen as representing broader attitudes in Gaul, although his numerous examples indicate that certain individuals, particularly certain royal women, did not see

continued political involvement as inherently objectionable. Most of these examples concern women of means, and Gregory did not provide extensive information about widows with few financial resources. Nonetheless, one suspects that Gregory held all widows to the same standard, since he made no distinction between royal, imperial, or senatorial widows, and since his biblical models, especially the poor widow of the Gospels, applied to all ranks of society. Lastly, it should be noted that Gregory's message toward widows has a hortatory quality indicative of a preacher, and his historical material was structured with this particular end in view.

II

ROYALS, MORALS, AND MARRIAGE

Sin had consequences, both in the hereafter and in the here and now, and Gregory believed that it was his duty as a bishop to provide the remedy for sin by instructing his audience in moral principles. This audience included the royalty of the realm, and Gregory had a particular message concerning the sexual conduct of certain kings. The failure of rulers like Chlothar, Guntram, Charibert and Chilperic to live up to the Christian view of monogamy and marriage was responsible for much of the political turmoil of Gregory's lifetime, since their habit of having children from various women created tension within the royal house that all too often spilled over into civil war. Mixed in with Gregory's spiritually inspired advice was a dose of Roman, senatorial sensibility: a king should marry, and remain faithful to one woman, who in turn should possess not only piety, but also high birth, grace, and intellect. Unsurprisingly, Gregory presented Clovis as an example of good marital policy, since the king had married Chlothild, who fit all of the criteria. In order to accomplish this presentation, however, Gregory had to manage his information with a great deal of skill, and his reason for selecting Clovis probably had as much to do with his audience's reverence for the great Merovingian as with the actual details of his life (Clovis had, after all, kept at least one concubine). Gregory found a better exemplar in his contemporary and patron, King Sigibert, who married the lovely Brunhild, and who never wavered in his fidelity.

Gregory's theme concerning royal marital policy dictated the shape of many important passages in his works, especially his *Historiae*. It is tied to his presentation of various sixth-century civil wars, and at times his need to connect these conflicts to the moral failings of the Merovingian kings obscures or distorts certain details. Likewise, Gregory characterised those kings who employed a different marital policy as driven by lust and whimsy, and in doing so he failed to appreciate their more rational motivations. Most significantly, however, Gregory's tendency to describe the marriages of his disliked kings according to an intentionally vague chronology, in order to make them appear especially licentious, has given rise to the view that the

Merovingians practiced polygamy. In its most extreme form, this interpretation sees the Merovingians as upholding an institutionalised polygamy that had existed continuously from Germanic antiquity. Even when employed in a milder form, this interpretation still risks overlooking the extent to which the concept of monogamy influenced the actions of both the kings and their partners, whether wives or concubines. In all likelihood, Merovingian kings had no more than one wife at a time, and even those who had mistresses still conducted themselves within a framework governed by the principles of monogamy and exclusivity. It is only after Gregory's theme on royal marital policy is analysed, and the literary techniques he used to articulate this theme are identified, that his narrative can be used in historical reconstructions of the marriages of the Merovingian royal house.

Chlothild and Clovis: Introducing a Theme

Gregory presented the marriage of Clovis and Chlothild as a model for proper marital policy, managing his material carefully in order to ensure that his account fit his greater moral theme. Gregory began by describing how Clovis first learnt of Chlothild, and how the king arranged to marry her. In his telling, Clovis had selected the girl based only on the fact that she fit the criteria of a worthy bride. When some of Clovis's envoys returned from Burgundy, they told him that they had found a princess who was intelligent (*sapiens*), of royal stock (*de regio genere*), and *elegans*, which might be translated as graceful and refined, and the king was suitably impressed.[1] Clovis then requested her hand in marriage from her uncle Gundobad, who had taken charge of her after killing her mother and father, and who was too fearful of the mighty king to refuse such a request.[2] Some of the problems with this account have already been discussed in the first chapter of this study, such as the possibility that Gundobad was not Chlothild's uncle, and that he was not responsible for the death of her parents. In addition to this, it is difficult to accept Gregory's statement that Gundobad, who seems to have been the most formidable ruler of Gaul at the time, trembled at the mere

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[1] Hist. 2.28. The attribute *de regio genere* may have been intended to indicate more than just Chlothild's Burgundian royal lineage, since, according to Gregory, her grandfather Gundioc descended *ex genere Athanarici regis*, i.e. from the Visigothic royalty; see Wolfram, *Geschichte*, p. 28 and n. 23. Against the genealogical value of this information, see Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 215, n. 447; and Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', p. 255.

[2] Hist. 2.28.

thought of crossing Clovis.[3] There are also a number of reasons to see Gregory's interpretation of the causes of this marriage as an oversimplification at best.

According to Fredegar, Chlothild had been resident in the Burgundian city of Geneva at the time of her betrothal, which seems to have been a power base for Gundobad's brother and disloyal subordinate, Godegisel.[4] Because Godegisel allied himself with Clovis in a failed attempt to overthrow Gundobad, which occurred around 501, one might naturally suspect that Chlothild's marriage to the Merovingian king somehow factored into these political manoeuvrings.[5] Unfortunately, Gregory's problematic chronology does not allow for a precise identification of the year of the marriage, but a circumstantial case can be made for a date around 502.[6] A letter, written by Avitus of Vienne, indicates that Gundobad had been planning to marry his own daughter to a king prior to her unforeseen death sometime after 501, and the most likely possibility is that Clovis was the intended royal groom.[7] Chlothild, therefore,

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[3] Gundobad had been given the prestigious title *magister militum*, which he saw himself as holding throughout his life; see Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, pp. 143-153.

[4] Fredegar, 3.18. When Epiphanius of Pavia wished to meet with Godegisel, he went to Geneva; see Ennodius, *Vita Epifani*, ed. by Friedrich Vogel, *MGH AA*, 7 (Berlin, 1885), 174. Godegisel's subordination to his brother is suggested by the fact that Ennodius described him as *germanus regis*, rather than simply *rex*. On power-sharing in the Burgundian kingdom, see Ian Wood, 'Kings, Kingdoms and Consent', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. by id. and P. H. Sawyer (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1977), pp. 6-29 (at pp. 20-23).

[5] Fredegar 3.33. On the date, which is uncertain, see Wood and Shanzer, *Avitus*, pp. 20-21 and n. 1. On Godegisel's alliance with Clovis, see Hist. 2.32-33; and Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 500; with Wood and Shanzer, *Avitus*, p. 17; Rouche, *Clovis*, pp. 214-216; and Karl Binding, *Das burgundisch- romanische Königreich (von 433-532 n. Chr.). Eine reichs- und rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1868), pp. 143-144, 154-156.

[6] See Rolf Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe: Reims 508. Versuch einer neuen Chronologie für die Regierungzeit des ersten christlichen Frankenkönigs unter Berücksichtigung des politischen und kirchlich-dogmatischen Probleme seiner Zeit* (Bern: Lang, 1971), pp. 41-44, 53. The problems with Gregory's chronology of Clovis's reign are discussed below. The only firm point of reference for the date of Chlothild's marriage is the fact that the couple must have been married early enough to have produced six children before Clovis's death in 511. Significantly, Chlothild's sons do not appear to have been active until 523, suggesting that they were still very young in 511, which would support a late (post-501) date for the marriage. This might explain why Clovis's son from a concubine, Theuderic, was incorporated into the division of the kingdom in 511, since he had reached the age of majority, having been active during Clovis's lifetime (e.g. Hist. 2.37). This analysis is complicated by the arguments of Marc Widdowson, who questioned whether or not Clovis's successors had ever come to a 'genuine agreement' over the division of his kingdom, 'Merovingian Partitions: A "Genealogical Charter"?', *EME*, 17 (2009), 1-22.

[7] Andre Van de Vyver, 'Clovis et la politique méditerranéenne', in *Etudes dédiées à la mémoire de Henri Pirenne* (Brussles: Nouvelle société d'édition, 1937), pp. 367-387 (at pp. 375-376); Weiss, *Chlodwigs*, pp. 41-42; Danuta Shanzer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis: The Bishop of Vienne vs the Bishop of Tours', *EME*, 7 (1998), 29-57 (at p. 55); Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, pp. 208-209; and

may have been a hastily secured replacement bride, whom Gundobad used in his attempt to secure peace with Clovis in the aftermath of the conflict that occurred in 501. This might explain Fredegar's curious statement that Aridius, a leading Burgundian loyal to Gundobad, objected to the marriage on the grounds that it was politically disadvantageous to the crown.[8] Whatever the case, it seems most reasonable to assume that Clovis was motivated to marry Chlothild out of political considerations, in addition to whatever inherent qualities she may have possessed, such as intellect and grace.[9]

Gregory described Chlothild's subsequent relationship with Clovis in a manner that seems equally idealised, although he was clearly limited by the common knowledge of his audience. In particular, Gregory recounted Chlothild's travails at converting her pagan husband.[10] When she gave birth to her son Ingomer, Chlothild desired to have the infant baptised, and so she implored her husband to embrace the Christian faith. When the king refused, she had Ingomer baptised anyway, in a church adorned with tapestries in the hope that the beauty of sacred art, together with the

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Ian Wood, 'The Latin Culture of Gundobad and Sigismund', in *Akkulturation*, pp. 367-380 (pp. 371-372). The letter is Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 5.

[8] Fredegar 3.18-19. See also *Vita Eptadii presbyteri Cervidunensis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 3 (Hannover, 1896), 8-9; and LHF 12. Gregory mentioned Aridius and his Burgundian status in Hist. 2.32. The additions to Gregory's narrative in later sources are discussed in Floria Cutra, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), 671-699 (at pp. 682-684); Isabelle Réal, 'Entre mari et femme: dons réciproques et gestions des biens à l'époque mérovingienne d'après les chroniques et les Vies de saints', in *Dots et douaires dans le haut moyen âge*, ed. by François Bougard et al. (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 2002), pp. 389-406 (at pp. 392-394); Kurth, *Sainte Clotilde*, pp. 20-34; and Jean Baptiste Dubos, *Histoire critique de l'établissement de la monarchie française dans les Gaules*, 3 vols (Amsterdam: Wetsten and Smith, 1735), I, 41-52.

[9] Although a post-501 date for Chlothild's marriage to Clovis seems probable, one should noted the ingenious attempt of Eugen Ewig to calculate a date of the marriage without appealing to Gregory's chronology of Clovis's reign. Ewig dated the marriage prior to 494, based on his estimate that Clovis and Chlothild's son Childebert had been born around that year. His reasoning was: both Charibert and Guntram had adopted male relatives after they had passed the age of 40; Childebert had adopted his nephew Theudebert in 534, so, assuming he was also no younger than 40 at this time, he must have been born no later than 494. Obviously, this hypothesis must be regarded as no more than a hunch, see his, 'Studien zur merowingischen Dynastie', in *Frühmittelalterlichen Studien*, 8 (1974), 15-59 (at 38); and id., 'Namengebung', p. 54.

[10] On Chlothild's efforts to convert her husband, see Schulenburg, *Forgetful*, pp. 180-187; and Felice Lifshitz, 'Des femmes missionnaires: l'exemple de la Gaule franque', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 83 (1988), 5-33 (at 13-15).

majesty of the liturgy, might move the king to belief.[11] When Ingomer tragically died

shortly after the baptism, Clovis ignorantly blamed the Christian God, while Chlothild

took solace in the fact that the sinless Ingomer was ensured a place in heaven. Her next

son, Chlodomer, also became seriously ill after his baptism, but on this occasion

Chlothild's prayers saved the child's life.[12] There is clearly a layer of interpretation

present in Gregory's account, which was designed to explain the death of Ingomer and

the sickness of Chlodomer in a manner consistent with Christian ideology in general,

and Gregory's view of Chlothild as an ideal spouse in particular.

Gregory next described how the unbelieving Clovis was converted by

Chlothild, in what may fairly be seen as a historical example of St. Paul's dictum from

his letter to the Corinthians: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his believing

wife.'[13] Chlothild's arguments about the futility of beseeching manmade idols were

assisted by a miracle, when Clovis, on campaign against the Alamanni in 496, turned to

the Christian God and offered to convert, if he were granted victory. After triumphing,

Clovis began to receive catechesis from Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, who eventually

baptised him, along with his sister and over three-thousand of his men – a number

perhaps inspired by the three thousand baptised at Pentecost.[14] Gregory's account of

Clovis's conversion is highly problematic, especially in regards to its chronology,

which has given rise to an extensive and longstanding scholarly debate.[15] A panegyric

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[11] On Merovingian church furnishings, including the furnishings used by Chlothild, see Allan Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture from the Early Church to the Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 97-102. For an account of Clovis's baptism with attention to the liturgical aspects, see Victor Saxer, 'Les Rites du baptême de Clovis dans le cadre de la pratique paléochrétienne', in *Clovis*, I, 229-242.

[12] Hist. 2.29.

[13] 1 Corinthians 7:14, '*Sanctificatus est enim vir infidelis in muliere fideli...*'

[14] Hist. 2.30-31. Other versions are found in a letter by Nicetius of Trier in *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 8; and *Vita sanctae Balthildis*, 18. For the baptisms at Pentecost, see Acts 2:41; with J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Long-Haired Kings', reprinted in *Long-Haired Kings*, 148-248 (at p. 170). McNamara suggested that Gregory may have downplayed the role of Remigius in order to focus on Chlothild's influence in her, 'Imitatio Helenae', pp. 60-61.

[15] See Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, pp. 362-369; Shanzer, 'Dating'; Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity, 371-1386 AD* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 103-107; Rouche, *Clovis*, pp. 272-277; William Daly, 'Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?' *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 619-664; Mark Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism of Clovis, 1886-1993', *EME*, 3 (1994), 97-116; Michael McCormick, 'Clovis at Tours: Byzantine Public Ritual and the Origins of Medieval Ruler Symbolism', in *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, ed. by Evangelos Chrysos and Andreas Schwarcz (Vienne: Böhlau, 1989), pp. 155-180; Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', pp. 637-641; id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 41-49; J. N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The*

written by Ennodius of Pavia to Theodoric, and a letter written by Cassiodorus, suggest that Clovis defeated the Alamanni in 506.[16] This finds some confirmation in a letter written by Avitus, Bishop of Vienne, which indicates that Clovis was baptised in either 507 or 508.[17] Although attempts have been made to salvage Gregory's chronology by positing two campaigns against the Alamanni, even this speculation can only resolve some of the difficulties.[18] Avitus's letter further indicates that Clovis had considered converting to Arianism before he decided on Catholicism, and this point seriously threatens Gregory's entire interpretation of the conversion.[19] Moreover, Avitus credited Clovis's conversion to the king's own agency, without mentioning Chlothild (or the battle against the Alamanni).[20] Although this does not negate the possibility that the queen had played a role in Clovis's conversion, it does highlight the efforts Gregory undertook in order to credit her as a critical influence upon her

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Conversion of Western Europe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 74-75; Arnold Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe: Kaiser, König und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländischen Missionsgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), pp. 165-176; Marc Reydellet, *La Royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1981), pp. 95-113; Ewig, 'Studien', pp. 36-38; Weiss, *Chlodwigs*; Bernard Bachrach, 'Procopius and the Chronology of Clovis's Reign', *Viator*, 1 (1970), 21-31; Tessier, *Le Baptême*; Levison, 'Geschichte'; Ferdinand Lot, 'La Victoire sur les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis', *RBPH*, 17 (1938), 63-69; Andre Van de Vyver, 'L'Unique victoire contre les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis en 506', *RBPH*, 17 (1938), 793-813; id., 'La Victoire contre les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis', *RBPH*, 16 (1937), 35-94; id., 'La Victoire contre les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis', *RBPH*, 15 (1936), 859-914; Léon Levillain, 'La Conversion et le baptême de Clovis', *RHÉF*, 21 (1935), 161-192; Bruno Krusch, 'Die erste deutsche Kaiserkrönung in Tours Weinachten 508', *Sitzungsberichte der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1933), pp. 1060-1066; id., 'Zwei Heiligenleben des Jonas von Susa. II: Die ältere Vita Vedastis und die Taufe Chlodovechs', in *MÖIG*, 14 (1893), 427-448; Wolfram von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs Übergang zum Christentum: Eine quellen kritische Studie', in *MÖIG*, 12 (1932), 417-501; Friedrich Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg über die Alamannen und seine Taufe', *HZ*, 56 (1886), 385-403; and Binding, *Burgundisch-*, pp. 141-143.

[16] Shanzer, 'Dating', pp. 53-54; Weiss, *Chlodwigs*, pp. 32-26, 59; Van de Vyver, 'L'Unique'; id., 'Victoire' (1937); id., 'Victoire' (1936); and Vogel, 'Chlodwigs'. For the panegyric, see Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico*, ed. by Friedrich Vogel, *MGH AA*, 7 (Berlin, 1885). For the letter, see Cassiodorus, *Variae*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, *MGH AA*, 12 (Berlin, 1894), 2.41.

[17] Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, pp. 365-366; Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', pp. 262-263, 265-272.

[18] Support for this has been sought in Gregory's two references to seemingly different battles against the Alamanni in Hist. 2.30, 2.37, as well as incidental differences between the accounts of Cassiodorus and Gregory, even though they agree on the central point – the Alaman king perished; see Shanzer, 'Dating', pp. 53-55 and n. 165.

[19] Shanzer 'Dating', p. 37; Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, 363-364; Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', pp. 266-267; and Kathleen Mitchell, 'Marking the Bounds: The Distant Past in Gregory's History', in *GoT*, pp. 295-306 (at pp. 301-304). The letter is Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 46. Clovis's sister Lenteild had accepted Arianism, according to the title of one of Avitus's lost sermons.

[20] Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae*, 46.

husband. Gregory was clearly willing to restructure his material, including the chronology of events, in order to present an account consistent with his overall literary themes.[21] One of these themes, among others, was his desire to present Chlothild as an ideal bride, by which other royal partners could be judged.

It is therefore noteworthy that Gregory chose to open Book 4 of the *Historiae* by reminding his audience of Chlothild's sanctity, stating that she died *plena dierum bonisque* and recounting her burial.[22] Although Gregory developed his ideas about royal marital policy throughout the entirety of his writings, Book 4 represents a particularly focused exploration of this theme. Martin Heinzelmann has demonstrated convincingly that the division of the *Historiae* into ten books has a fundamental role in organising the work's thematic content, and that the opening section of each book serves as a kind of preface, articulating the subsequent leitmotif.[23] Heinzelmann's analysis of the thematic content of Book 4, however, focused on the civil wars recounted in the book, which Gregory presented as the tragic consequences of the sinfulness of Gallic society.[24] Curiously, Heinzelmann passed over Gregory's opening words on Chlothild, and instead he considered chapter 2 to be the 'start of the book' (*Buchanfang*), although he gave no explanation as to why this second chapter deserved precedent.[25] While Gregory certainly did develop his theme concerning sinfulness and consequent internal warfare within Book 4, he also explored the moral repercussions of royal marital policy, and indeed the two themes are interrelated. Civil wars resulted from problems of succession between fathers and sons, or inheritance between siblings, and such issues were exacerbated when the siblings were mere half-brothers, or the sons were the offspring of women who had later been repudiated by their fathers in favour of new brides. Gregory's reference to Chlothild at the opening of Book 4,

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[21] For the opposing view, affirming the historicity of Gregory's chronology, see Spencer, 'Dating'.

[22] Hist. 4.1.

[23] Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 84-136 (especially pp. 106-113). Heinzelmann referred to the prologues as *Gebrauchsanweisung* (p. 106). The importance of the prefaces for interpreting Gregory's works was also observed by Franz Brunhölzl, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters I: Von Cassidor bis zum Ausklang der karolingischen Erneuerung* (Munich: Fink, 1975), I, 133-137. See also Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 297-299; and John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 88-90.

[24] Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 122-124.

[25] Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 123 and n. 93.

therefore, frames the theme of proper marital policy by calling to mind the golden age of Clovis (as discussed below), and the fitting bride who made it possible through her resolute faith.

Gregory's idealisation of the marriage between Clovis and Chlothild is perhaps best indicated by the manner in which he minimised the blemishes and inconsistencies of their legacy. Clovis, after all, had fathered a son, Theuderic, from a concubine, and this fact did not fit well with Gregory's theme. It could hardly be omitted, however, since Theuderic had reigned from 511-533, and since his son, Theudebert, had reigned from 533-548, earning the accolade *Rex Magnus Francorum* from Marius of Avenches, with some justification.[26] What is surprising, however, is how little Gregory said of this concubine, whom he failed to name, and whom he only mentioned once in all of his works.[27] Gregory's silence resulted in the distinct impression that this unnamed concubine was a woman of Clovis's past, who had exited the scene without ado prior to Chlothild's arrival. Thus, while Gregory may not have been able to write her out of the *Historiae*, for reasons beyond his control, he certainly came as close to doing so as he could.

While conclusions based on Gregory's silence must naturally be viewed with caution, there is sufficient reason to believe that his narrative of Chlothild was shaped in view of thematic considerations. Of course, Gregory's account undoubtedly testifies to other influences, and to an extent he may simply have been following his sources. Chlothild had resided in Tours from 511 to 544, and so she may have played a role in transmitting information about Clovis's reign, which eventually reached Gregory in the form of local traditions.[28] Nonetheless, Gregory's skill as an author equipped him with the literary devices necessary to overcome such restrictions in order to present Chlothild as the ideal royal bride. Indeed, if Gregory's portrait of Clovis may be fairly described as 'the image of a Catholic king against whom his successors could be assessed,' then it follows that Clovis's marriage to Chlothild served as the ideal royal

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[26] Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 548. See Collins, 'Theudebert'.

[27] Hist. 2.28.

[28] Hist. 2.43. For example, see Tessier, *Baptême*, p. 74. For cautionary words on this approach, see Wood, 'Gregory and Clovis', pp. 252-253. One need not follow Wolfram von den Steinen's imaginative hypothesis that she personally narrated these events to a very young Gregory; see his, 'Chlodwigs', p. 476.

union within the *Historiae*. [29] It is certainly no accident that Gregory mentioned Chlothild at the beginning of Book 4, which concerned itself to such an extent with proper marital policy. Refined, adroit, of noble lineage, and steadfast in her faith, Chlothild deserved credit as a benevolent influence in her husband's life and a model for the qualities that any intelligent Merovingian should seek when looking for a bride. Unfortunately for the realm, few monarchs learned from this example, as Gregory explained in detail subsequently in Book 4.

Bad Marital Policy: Chlothar, Guntram, and Charibert

After Gregory highlighted his themes on royal marital policy and on the turmoil faced by a sinful Gaul in the opening two chapters of Book 4, he wove both themes together in his account of Chlothar's whimsical approach to marriage and the wars involving his sons. Chapter three opens with the root of the problem: Chlothar had sons *de diversis mulieribus*, including the concubine Chunsina and two sisters whom he married, Ingund and Aregund. [30] Gregory indulged in telling the disparaging yet entertaining story of how Chlothar had come to marry siblings. Ingund had been elevated from the rank of *ancilla* upon her marriage to the king, and she asked her husband if he could also find a man of ability and means to wed Aregund, so that she would be honoured, rather than disgraced, by her servile sister. Upon hearing this, Chlothar began to desire Aregund for himself, since he was exceedingly licentious (*cum esset nimium luxoriosus*), as Gregory explained. Chlothar went to the villa where Aregund resided, and he arranged to marry the girl. He then returned and informed Ingund of the good news: 'I have managed to complete the reward that you in your generosity requested of me. You asked for a man both wealthy and wise, whom I should join to your sister. Well, I found no one more worthy than myself.' [31]

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[29] The quote is from Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 42; cf. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', p. 63; also, with more hesitation, Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 218-219. Gregory's presentation of Clovis's reign as a golden age is most apparent in Hist. 5.0 (prologue), 8.30.

[30] For Chunsina's status as a concubine, see below. Although Gregory's narrative serves as the only primary source of information on these women, Aregund is also known archaeologically through the objects discovered in her grave. For a bibliography on the sources discussing these objects, see Bailey Young, 'Exemple aristocratique et mode funéraire dans la Gaule mérovingienne', *Annales*, 41 (1986), 379-407 (at p. 406, nn. 37-38).

[31] Hist. 4.3, '*Tractavi mercedem illam implere, quam me tua dulcedo expetit. Et requirens virum divitem atque sapientem, quem tuae sorori deberem adiungere, nihil melius quam me ipsum inveni.*'

Gregory clearly intended this story to embarrass Chlothar and to entertain his audience, but it had a deeper moral and political message. Gregory recounted, with sorrow, the wars between Chlothar's son from Aregund (Chilperic), and his sons from Ingund (Charibert, Guntram, and Sigibert), following the king's death in December 561.[32] The conflict had severe consequences, especially when Chilperic sent his son Theudebert on a rapacious campaign against his enemies in the Touraine and the Limousin, which inspired one of Gregory's gravest laments: 'He burned churches, confiscated their plate, executed priests, destroyed monasteries, made sport of nuns, and laid waste to everything; there was a greater cry of sorrow in the churches than had occurred even in the time of the persecution of Diocletian.'[33] The conflict between these offspring continued intermittently, reaching its climax in 575, when Sigibert was assassinated by the agents of Chilperic's wife, Fredegund, thwarting his own attempts to see his brother put to death.[34] Fratricide was one of Gregory's most hated sins, and, in a sense, this tragic result was ultimately the consequence of Chlothar's decision to base his choice of bride solely on his *nimium luxoriosus*.[35]

Chlothar's poor marital policy had already borne bad fruit years before, while the king was still alive. In 555, when he had acquired the late King Theudebald's territories, his son Chramn rebelled in an attempt to establish his own autonomous share of the Merovingian kingdoms.[36] Chramn may have seen his half-brothers as a

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[32] Hist. 4.22. Gregory expressed his sorrow explicitly a few chapters later, in Hist. 4.50. Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 9.1, hints that Chilperic may have been Chlothar's favoured son; see Reydellet, *Royauté*, p. 311. For words of caution regarding this interpretation, see George, *Personal*, p. 75, n. 10.

[33] Hist. 4.47, '...*ecclesias incendit, ministeria detrahit, clericos interficit, monasteria vivorum deicit, puellarum deludit et cuncta devastat. Fuitque tempore illo peior in eclesiis gemitus quam tempore persecutionis Diocliciani.'*

[34] Hist. 4.51.

[35] On Gregory's use of *luxuria*, see Shanzer, 'History', p. 398.

[36] Hist. 4.9, 4.16. On the date of Theudebald's death, see Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 555. On Chramn's revolt, see Julia Hofmann, 'The Men Who Would be Kings: Challenges to Royal Authority in the Frankish Regna, c. 500-700' (unpublished doctoral thesis: Oxford, Queen's College, Hilary Term 2008), pp. 72-111; Hubert le Bourdellès, 'L'Anthroponymie dans la famille de Clovis', in *Clovis*, I, 805-816 (at 812-813); Konrad Bund, *Thronsturz und Herrscherabsetzung im Frühmittelalter* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1979), pp. 255-258; Heike Grahn-Hoek, *Die fränkische Oberschicht im 6. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer rechtlichen und politischen Stellung* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1976), pp. 185-188; Wood, 'Kings', pp. 11-12; Reinhard Schneider, *Königswahl und Königserhebung im Frühmittelalter: Unterschungen zur Herrschaftsnachfolge bei den Langobarden und Merowingern* (Stuttgart: Hiersmann, 1972), pp. 85-86; Bernard Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organisation 481-751* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), pp. 28-29; and Erich

threat; a similar situation played itself out in the 580s, when Gundovald sought to enforce his claim that he was Chlothar's son from a concubine, and that he was therefore due a share of the Merovingian kingdoms, at his half-brothers' expense.[37] Gregory was dismayed at the familial nature of Chramn's conflict with his father, especially when the prince found an ally in his uncle, Childebert, even though, as Gregory put it, Childebert had a religious duty to advise Chramn against patricide.[38] Chramn found initial successes, avoiding the best efforts of his half-brothers Charibert and Guntram to defeat him on the field of battle, but his fortunes turned after Childebert died suddenly from illness in 558, and he was eventually captured by his father.[39] In an act of extreme retribution, Chlothar had his son locked in a cottager's hovel with his wife and daughters, then had him strangled, and the hut burned, with the family inside – a downfall which echoes the tragic demise of Emperor Valens after his infamous defeat at Adrianople.[40] Chramn's campaigns had caused significant turmoil in Gregory's native Clermont, and, following the prince's downfall, St. Martin's church in Tours was damaged by a fire set by two of Chramn's fleeing supporters.[41] Thus, Gregory knew personally the tragic consequences that Chlothar's *nimium luxoriosus* and the inter-familial strife that it entailed.

Gregory was not the only critic of Chlothar's marriages. The king also married Wuldetrada, the widow of his great-uncle Theudebald, who had died in 555, and this brought the rebuke of more than one bishop, causing the king to marry her off to one

Zöllner and Joachim Werner, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1970), p. 103.

[37] On the Gundovald affair, see Hofmann, 'Men', pp. 157-187; Wood, 'Deconstructing', pp. 161-162; id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 93-101; id., 'The Secret Histories', pp. 263-266; Constantin Zuckerman, 'Qui a rappelé en Gaule le *ballomer* Gondovald?', *Francia*, 25 (1998), 1-18; Bachrach, *Anatomy*; Ulrich Nonn, "Ballomeris quidam': Ein merowingischer Prätendent des VI. Jahrhunderts', in *Arbor amoena comis*, ed. by Ewald Könsgen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), pp. 35-40; Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*; Schneider, *Königswahl*; Bund, *Thronsturz*, pp. 277-283; Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 94-105; Goubert, *Byzance*, I, 29-68; id., 'L'aventure de Gondovald'; Paul Goubert, 'L'Aventure de Gondovald et les monnaies franques de l'empereur Maurice', *Échos d'Orient*, 39 (1940), 414-443; and Godefroid Kurth, 'La reine Brunehaut', in *Études franques*, I, 265-356 (at 286-295).

[38] Hist. 4.16, *'Ille vero, dolose quidem, se suscipere eum promittit, quem monere spiritaliter debuerat, ne patri existeret inimicus.'*

[39] Hist. 4.16.

[40] Hist. 4.20. On Valens, see Ammianus Marcellinus, ed. by John Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 3 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1935-1939), 31.13:14-15.

[41] Hist. 4.20; cf. Hist. 10.31. For Chramn's nefarious activities in Clermont, see Hist. 4.13, 4.16; and GM 65.

of his *duces* instead.[42] Gregory was vague about which specific bishops objected to the union, giving the impression that the *episcopi* were united in their disapproval. He also failed to mention that Wuldetrada was a daughter of the Lombard king Waccho and the Gepid princess Austriguna, perhaps because her royal background might have made her seem like a more fitting choice.[43] Similarly, Gregory failed to give the background of Chlothar's other wife, Guntheuca, although he did mention that she had been the wife of Chlothar's late brother, which meant that the union fell under the incest prohibitions of Merovingian conciliar legislation.[44] Unlike with Wuldetrada, Guntheuca's background cannot be discerned from other sources, though the presence of the element *gun-* in her name might imply a connection to the Burgundian royal family, since it was shared by the Burgundian kings Gundioc, Gundobad, and Gunthar.[45] Gregory only presented one of Chlothar's brides as a fitting choice – the Thuringian princess and devout ascetic, Radegund.[46] Chlothar, however, ruined this

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[42] Hist. 4.9.

[43] Walter Pohl, 'Gregory of Tours and Contemporary Perceptions of Lombard Italy', in *GoT*, pp. 131-143 (at p. 133). For Wuldetrada's royal credentials, see Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 1.21.

[44] Hist. 3.6. On the Merovingian church and incest prohibitions, see Hubertus Lutterbach, *Sexualität im Mittelalter: Eine Kulturstudie anhand von Bußbüchern des 6. bis 12. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 30-32, 166-194, 217-220; Wood, 'Incest'; Gillian Clarke, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 41-46; Mayke De Jong, 'An Unsolved Riddle: Early Medieval Incest Legislation', in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by Ian Wood (San Marino: Boydell, 1998), 107-125 (at pp. 115-116); Pontal, *Synoden*, pp. 261-262; Wemple, *Women*, pp. 36-37 and pp. 219-220, n. 55; Mikat, *Die Inzestgesetzgebung*; and Jean Fleury, *Recherches historiques sur les empêchements de parenté dans le mariage canonique des origines aux Fausses décrétales* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1933), pp. 84-112.

[45] Ewig, 'Namengebung', pp. 26-27, 42-43. The element *gun-* as a Burgundian naming element was also discussed by Wilhelm Wackernagel, 'Sprache und Sprachdenkmäler der Burgunden', in *Burgundisch-*, pp. 376-444 (at pp. 390-392).

[46] On Radegund, see Julia Smith, 'Radegundis peccatrix: Authorizations of Virginity in Late Antique Gaul', in *Transformations of Late Antiquity*, ed. by Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 303-326; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 228-231; Coon, *Sacred*, pp. 126-135; Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), pp. 108-110; Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 30-40, 98-99; Isabel Moreira, 'Provisatrix optima: St. Radegund of Poitiers' relic petitions to the East', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19 (1993), 285-305; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 136-139; Sabine Gäbe, 'Radegundis: sancta regina, ancilla. Zum Heiligkeitsideal der Radegundisviten von Fortunat und Baudonivia', *Francia*, 16 (1989), 1-30; Edmond-René Labande, 'Radegonde: reine, moniale et pacificatrice', in *La riche personnalité de sainte Radegonde* (Poitiers: Comité du XIVe Centenaire, 1988), pp. 23-32; Wemple, *Women*, pp. 181-185; Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Königstöchter im Kloster. Radegund (ob. 587) und der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers (589)', *MIÖG*, 87 (1979), 1-

opportunity when he ordered the execution of Radegund's brother, which, in Gregory's estimation, caused Radegund to found a convent in Poitiers where she could dedicate herself to God, rather than her husband.[47]

Chlothar's son, Guntram, also suffered from Gregory's critique of his marital policy. This is perhaps surprising, since, in other contexts, Gregory was willing to praise the king. For example, in one instance Gregory even credited Guntram with a miracle, when a woman used the threads of his royal cloak to cure her son.[48] Indeed, several historians have viewed Guntram as an ideal monarch within the *Historiae*, whom Gregory praised with the accolade of *rex bonus*.[49] This interpretation, however, is challenged by other passages emphasising Guntram's shortcomings, and it may be that even those moments of flattery were inspired by fear rather than admiration.[50] Indeed, the first passage in which the title of *rex bonus* appears seems to apply the accolade in a deeply ironic sense. Gregory described how the 'good king' Guntram had dismissed his concubine and *ancilla*, Veneranda, even though she had given him a son, in favour of Marcatrude, only to suffer a tragedy when Marcatrude had his son by Veneranda poisoned. Gregory wrote that Marcatrude had been motivated by jealousy, and for this reason she was soon punished by God, when her own son perished *iudicio Dei*. The ultimate loser in all of this, of course, was King Guntram, who watched his two sons die as the result of his marital habits, although he failed to learn his lesson, since he

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37 (at 21-25, 33-34); Merta, 'Helena', pp. 7-9; Graus, *Volk*, pp. 365, 407-410; Delaruelle, 'Radegonde'; Portmann, *Darstellung*, pp. 38-44; Fontaine, *Sulpice*, pp. 114-115, 133, 137-140; Louise Coudanne, 'Baudonivie, moniale de Sainte-Croix et biographie de sainte Radegonde', in *Études mérovingiennes* (Paris: Picard, 1953), pp. 41-51; René Aigrain, *Sainte Radegonde vers 520-587*, 3rd edn (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1924); and Eckenstein, *Women*, pp. 51-65.

47 Hist. 3.7.

48 Hist. 9.21; cf. the miraculous cure of the woman with a haemorrhage of blood in Matthew 9:20-23; Mark 5:25-34; and Luke 8:43-48. On the other hand, even this passage may have been 'a secretive way of signalling disagreement with Austrasian policy,' rather than outright praise of Guntram; see Wood, 'Secret', p. 261.

49 Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 106-118; Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 49-69; Reydellet, *Royauté*, pp. 421-425; Henry Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), pp. 88-91; Bund, *Thronsturz*, p. 270; Goffart ranked Guntram as one of 'three virtuous kings' in the *Historiae*, although one subjected to criticism nonetheless; see his, *Narrators*, pp. 178, 208, 225-227. Goffart's comment is similar to that made by Dalton, *History*, I, 57. Breukelaar saw Gregory's meeting with Guntram at Orléans in 585 as a turning point, whereafter he decided that Guntram was a true *rex bonus*; see his *Hagiography*, pp. 238-240.

50 Halsall, 'Nero', pp. 347-350. See also Wood, 'Secret', pp. 259-263; and id., 'Individuality', pp. 44-45.

dismissed Marcatrude in favour of Austrechild, a former *familia* of Marcatrude's father.[51]

Guntram's marriage to Austrechild brought him a measure of criticism. When Marcatrude's brothers openly slandered their sister's replacement, for example, Guntram had them executed and their property confiscated.[52] Similarly, when Sagittarius, Bishop of Gap, questioned the ability of Austrechild's sons to inherit a share of the kingdom, Guntram sent him off to a monastery and confiscated his property as well.[53] Gregory's comments on the issue are curious. He seemingly disagreed with Sagittarius, writing that, 'regardless of their mother's birth, all the males sired by kings are called sons of a king.'[54] However, even if Guntram's sons by Austrechild were worthy of being called *regis liberi*, it is not clear that this necessarily entitled them to kingship.[55] According to the *Codex Theodosianus*, children born from a free man and an unfree woman acquired the status of their mother, and so Gregory's words, read narrowly, simply noted an exception to this law that applied when the free man in question was a Merovingian.[56] Gregory's rather gossamer refutation of Sagittarius's position, therefore, may have been feigned, in an effort to conceal his true feelings enough to avoid a fate similar to that suffered by his more outspoken colleague.[57] There was no need to press the point, since Guntram's two sons by Austrechild died of illness while still very young, an event which Gregory may well have seen as a sign of God's disapproval of Guntram's behaviour.[58]

It is clear that Gregory saw Austrechild as a very poor choice of bride, and the former slave's bad character inspired Guntram to undertake one of his most heinous acts. When Austrechild fell mortally ill, she decided that she wanted others to accompany her to the grave, 'so that their funerals would be mourned along with her own.'[59] She told Guntram that her physicians were to blame for her imminent death,

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[51] Hist. 4.25. Gregory mentioned Austrechild's servile status in Hist. 5.20.
[52] Hist. 5.17.
[53] Hist. 5.20.
[54] Hist. 5.20, '*praetermissis nunc generibus feminarum, regis vocitantur liberi, qui de regibus fuerant procreati.*'
[55] Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 165.
[56] *Codex Theodosianus*, 4.6.
[57] Wood, 'Secret', pp. 262-263.
[58] Hist. 5.17; 5.20; cf. Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, anno 577.
[59] Hist. 5.35, '*...ut in exsequiis eius aliorum funera plangerentur.*'

and that she wanted them to be executed at the same moment that she breathed her last.[60] 'Let there be the same bout of grief for their friends as there will be for mine,' she begged.[61] When Austrechild died, Guntram fulfilled her request, inspiring Gregory's understated condemnation: 'The good sense of most will know that this was not done without sin.'[62] It is telling that Fredegar omitted this story when he copied from the *Historiae*, probably in order to avoid any sense of irony in his claim that, 'Guntram was a good king, fearing God.'[63] Gregory had no such reservations, and he was more than willing to allow his negative description of Austrechild to rub off on her royal husband.[64] There is surely a slight, also, in his account of Guntram's treatment of Theudogild, whom the king robbed by first pretending to accept her offer of marriage, discussed in the previous chapter of this study. 'It is proper that this treasure should belong to me, rather than that woman, who was unworthy to approach my brother's bed,' Gregory had the king proclaim, in a justification of the crime that is deeply ironic, considering Guntram's propensity to take unworthy wives into his own bed.[65] Gregory's introduction of Guntram as a *rex bonus* at the beginning of his account of the king's marriages, therefore, is best interpreted as more of a satire than a salute.[66]

Although Guntram's marital policy was tragic because he never found a worthy bride, his brother Charibert made the mistake of repudiating his first wife, who was a fitting choice, in favour of a series of lowborn women. Gregory apparently held

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[60] On the practice of medicine in Gaul, see Riché, *Education*, pp. 204-206; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, II, 302-303; James, 'Sense', pp. 54-57; West, *Roman*, pp. 155-157; and Valerie Flint, 'The Early Medieval "Medicus", the Saint – and the Enchanter', *Social History of Medicine*, 2 (1989), 127-145 (at pp. 131-133). On Gregory's use of medical terminology and his access to medical treatises, see Bonnet, *Latin*, pp. 218-220. Gregory's knowledge of medicine may have been substantial.

[61] Hist. 5.35, '*Sit unus dolus nostris pariter ac eorum amicis.*'

[62] Hist. 5.35, '*Quod non sine peccato fuisse facto, multorum censit prudentia.*'

[63] Fredegar, 3.56, '*Guntramnus fiut rex bonus, timens Deum.*' Cf. Fredegar 3.77, 3.82, where some of the relevant information is safely tucked away.

[64] Wood, 'Secret', pp. 262-263.

[65] Hist. 4.26, '*Rectius est enim, ut hi thesauri penes me habeantur, quam post hanc, quae indigne germani mei torum adivit.*'

[66] On Gregory's use of satire, see Goffart, *Narrators*, especially p. 177. Satire was undoubtedly part of Gregory's literary toolbox, but characterising him principally as a satirist may overstate the case; see Danuta Shanzer, 'Laughter and Humour in the Early Medieval Latin West', in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 25-47 (at pp. 32-34); and Barbara Rosenwein, 'Writing and Emotions in Gregory of Tours', in *Vom Nutzen des Schreibens: Soziales Gedächtnis, Herrschaft und Besitz*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Paul Herold (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), pp. 23-32 (at pp. 28-29).

Charibert's queen Ingoberg in high regard, at least during her widowhood, as discussed in the previous chapter of this study, and he probably considered her to be Charibert's best opportunity to forge a successful union. She was, after all, 'a very prudent woman, especially gifted for the religious life, diligent in her vigils, prayers, and almsgiving.'[67] However, this marriage suffered when Charibert became enchanted by two of Ingoberg's servants, the sisters Merofled and Marcovefa, who were the daughters of a lowly woolworker. Ingoberg attempted to impress upon her husband the servile status of these girls by putting their father to work in his sight, but the plan backfired when an enraged Charibert dismissed Ingoberg in favour of Merofled. Later, an unsatisfied Charibert married Merofled's sister, Marcovefa, who also happened to be a nun, which earned him an excommunication from Bishop Germanus of Paris (discussed below). Gregory concluded with the couple's subsequent demise: 'Since the king refused to repudiate her, she was struck by the judgement of God, and died; not long afterwards the king followed her to the grave.'[68]

In this example, Gregory was frank about the consequences of Charibert's whimsical marital policy, suggesting that it led to his death and damnation. It also left the king heirless. Another wife, Theudogild, had given birth to a son, but he was stillborn – 'no sooner born than buried,' Gregory quipped.[69] Charibert's daughters did not fare well either, except for his daughter by Ingoberg, who went on to marry an Anglo-Saxon prince. Berthefled became a nun at a convent in Tours, although, according to Gregory, she had a woeful reputation: 'She was truly gluttonous and slovenly, and she had no regard for the keeping of the Divine Office.'[70] Charibert's daughter Chlothild was even worse, leading a rebellion at Sainte-Croix in Poitiers that resulted in the sacking of the monastery, the desecration of its relics, the marriage of numerous nuns to unscrupulous characters, and an assault on Gregory's own niece, Justina.[71] Gregory did not identify the mothers of these two girls, but, based on their name elements, one might assign Berthefled to Merofled, and Chlothild, with less

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[67] Hist. 9.26, 'mulier valde cauta ac vitae religiosae praedita, vigiliis et orationibus atque elymosinis non ignava.'

[68] Hist. 4.26, 'Sed cum eam rex relinquere nollit, percussa iudicio Dei obiit. Ne multo post et ipse rex post eam decessit.'

[69] Hist. 4.26, '...qui ut processit ex alvo, protinus delatus est ad sepulchrum.'

[70] Hist. 9.33, 'Erat enim gulae et somno dedita et nullam de officio Dei curam habens.'

[71] Hist. 9.39-43, 10.15-17, 10.20. Gregory may actually have doubted Chlothild's royal connections, see Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 158.

certainty, to Theudogild.[72] Gregory had even further reason to dislike Charibert's other wife, Marcovefa, since she had been a patroness of Gregory's nemesis, Leudast, who rose to prominence in her household even though he possessed the baneful qualities of lust (*cupiditas*), decadence (*luxuria*), and materialism (*vanitas*).[73] Later in Leudast's career, after he had become *Comes* of Tours, because of the increasing sinfulness of the populace (*peccatis populi ingruentibus*), he accused Gregory of slandering Queen Fredegund as an adulteress, a charge which put Gregory's life in serious jeopardy.[74] Based on all of this, it is fair to say that nothing good had come from Charibert's decision to dismiss Ingoberg in favour of various lowborn women.

Sigibert and Chilperic: Contrasting Examples

The string of irresponsible kings was broken with Sigibert, who, in Gregory's view, learnt from the mistakes of his royal colleagues: 'When King Sigibert saw his brothers take unworthy wives, even joining themselves in worthless marriages to slaves, he sent a delegation to Spain with many gifts in order to ask for Brunhild, the daughter of King Athanagild.'[75] In Gregory's view, Brunhild qualified as a worthy choice, and he was not short on compliments for the princess, describing her as lovely (*venusta*), upright (*honesta*), beautiful (*decora*), discerning (*prudens*), charming (*blanda*), royal (*filia regis*), and refined (*elegans*).[76] She also brought with her a sizable treasure, and, most importantly, converted to Catholicism from Arianism – 'she remains a Catholic still, in

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[72] Ewig, 'Namengebung', pp. 41, 57.

[73] These sinful qualities put Leudast in rather bad company in Gregory's corpus, see Shanzer, 'History', p. 398.

[74] Hist. 5.48-49. Gregory's trial, and the risks he faced (which are a matter of contention), are discussed in Chapter IV.

[75] Hist. 4.27, '*Porro Sigyberthus rex cum videret, quod fratres eius indignas sibimet uxores acciperent et per vilitatem suam etiam ancillas in matrimonium sociarent, legationem in Hispaniam mittit et cum multis muneribus Brunichildem, Athanagildi regis filiam, petiit.*' On the political circumstances of the marriage, see Janet Nelson, 'A propos des femmes royales dans les rapports entre le monde wisigothique et le monde franc à l'époque de Reccared', in ead., *Rulers and Ruling Families in Early Medieval Europe: Alfred, Charles the Bald, and Others* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 465-476; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 121-123, 169-175; and Bruno Dumézil, *La reine Brunehaut* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), pp. 115-123.

[76] Venantius Fortunatus also praised Brunhild's virtues in his epithalamium of her marriage to Sigibert, see his *Carmina*, 6.1; also Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 117-123. On the manner in which the sources tended to describe a queen's beauty and character, see Thiellet, *Femmes*, pp. 45-48, 53-56.

the name of Christ,' Gregory concluded.[77] This list of qualities was reminiscent of those Gregory applied to Queen Chlothild, who, besides her religious piety, was *elegans*, *sapiens*, and *de regio genere*, and he probably expected his audience to draw the obvious parallels, since Brunhild was the first worthy bride mentioned since Chlothild's appearance in the *Historiae*.[78]

Gregory also praised the union when he invested a degree of optimism in the birth of their son, Childebert II. Other than his vague reference to the *filii* of Sigibert and Brunhild, Gregory reserved mention of Childebert II until the conclusion of Book 4 of the *Historiae*, where it had dramatic effect.[79] Gregory's reference to Childebert – 'after the death of Sigibert, his son Childebert ruled in his stead' – was the final line of prose in the Book, followed only by a calculation of the number of years from the Creation to Sigibert's death.[80] Because of this calculation of years, it is tempting to speculate that, for Gregory, Childebert II's reign signalled the birth of a new historic age, especially since the only other book in the *Historiae* to end with a similar reckoning of years was the final tenth book. This, together with other evidence, led Martin Heinzelmann to hypothesise that Gregory had intended Books 1-4 to serve as a stand-alone publication, with his decision to extend the *Historiae* to ten books coming later.[81] Moreover, Gregory used Childebert II's regnal years as the chronological framework for Books 5-10, even though Tours was in the possession of Chilperic and Guntram for most of the years recounted in those books.[82] This positive emphasis on Childebert II, and the sense of hopefulness, strongly contrasts the manner in which Gregory presented the offspring of the royals marriages that, in his view, involved poorly chosen brides.

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[77] Hist. 4.27, '*Quae in nomine Christi catholica perseverat.*' On the conversion, see Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 128-130, although Dumézil's interpretation may downplay the obstacles confronting a would-be convert from Arianism to Catholicism too much.

[78] Hist. 2.28.

[79] Hist. 4.51.

[80] Hist. 4.51, '*Mortuo autem Sigybertho, regnavit Childeberthus, filius eius, pro eo.*'

[81] Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 97-102; with the earlier comments of Rudolf Buchner, *Gregor von Tours: Zehn Bücher Geschichten*, 2 vols (Darmstadt, 1967), I, xx-xxv; and Bonnet, *Latin*, p. 11, n. 3. Some words of caution were expressed by Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 29-30. See also Halsall, 'Preface', pp. 311-312, where it is suggested that the murder of Sigibert, and the calamitous events of the mid 570s, inspired Gregory to write his *Historiae*, beginning, perhaps, with the preface to Book 5. Although this interpretation, in some ways, disagrees with Heinzelmann's hypothesis, it is consistent with the view that the close of Book 4 had a critical function in the structure of the *Historiae*, since its subject is the same as the opening of Book 5. For a critique of Halsall's hypothesis, see Hofmann, 'Men', p. 121.

[82] Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 148-151 and n. 11 .

Immediately after narrating Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild, Gregory recounted, in starkly contrasting language, the marriages of King Chilperic, who fell far short of his half-brother's example. At first, Chilperic showed promise, when he decided to follow Sigibert's lead and marry Brunhild's sister, Galswinth.[83] Chilperic already had a history of selecting unworthy brides, but he agreed to dismiss his other wives as a condition of marrying the Visigothic princess (the precise status of these alleged 'wives' will be discussed below). There is every reason to think that Gregory held Galswinth in the same high regard as her sister, and he praised the amount of wealth that she brought into the Merovingian realm, as well as her conversion to Catholicism. Chilperic, however, kept a place in his heart for his former wife, Fredegund, and this became a source of scandal for Galswinth, who asked to be allowed to return to Spain, even offering to leave her treasure behind. Chilperic, however, had a different idea about how to get rid of her: 'In his cunning Chilperic deceived her, appeasing her with gentle words until, at last, he ordered a slave to strangle her.'[84] Gregory added that the king had ordered the murder on account of his love for Fredegund (*per amorem Fredegundis*), and he enhanced the tragic feel of the crime by characterising Galswinth as a saint, who worked miracles from her tomb. As a final touch, Gregory stated that Chilperic's brothers were so enraged with the murder that they threw Chilperic out of his kingdom (*eum a regno deieciunt*).[85] This claim is very odd, since Gregory next described Chilperic's wars with Sigibert, without mentioning how Chilperic returned to power from his banishment.[86] The author of the *LHF* was equally puzzled, amending the statement: *eum de regno deiecere voluerunt*.[87] Although difficult to understand, Gregory's claim is explicable in the context of his theme on royal marital policy, since, by associating Chilperic's murder of Galswinth with a temporary loss of power, Gregory emphasised the negative consequences of the king's choice to dispose of a worthy bride in favour of the wicked Fredegund.

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[83] On Chilperic's marriage to Galswinth, see Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 159-169.

[84] Hist. 4.28, '*Quod ille per ingenia dissimulans, verbis eam lenibus demulsit. Ad extremum enim suggillari iussit a puero.*'

[85] Hist. 4.28.

[86] Hist. 4.49.

[87] LHF 31. Fredegar simply copied Gregory's words (3.60). This was observed by Gerberding, *Rise*, p. 44.

Chilperic had another former wife in Audovera, who had given him several children, and this also caused problems for the king, as his new wife Fredegund jealously sought to eliminate this branch of the royal family.[88] Indeed, it was this fear of disenfranchisement that, in all likelihood, inspired Audovera's son Merovech to rebel against his father – an endeavour that ultimately failed when, after he had avoided several of Fredegund's assassination attempts, the defeated prince took his own life.[89] Another of Audovera's sons, Chlodovech, became a rival to his stepmother after she suspected that he had used witchcraft to bring about the death of her two young sons from disease. The queen had Chlodovech's alleged accomplice tortured in order to extract a confession, his lover impaled, and then she had the prince himself murdered, disguising the crime and a suicide – and, finally, she had Audovera put to death and her property confiscated.[90] Gregory declined to confirm the charge of witchcraft, but he did put a speech into Chlodovech's mouth, where the prince bragged that, upon the death of Fredegund's young sons, the whole of Gaul had fallen into his grasp, which indicates that he saw the boys as his rivals.[91] The tragic fate of Audovera's line of the Merovingian house served as an example of what might happen when a king exchanged one wife for another.

Elsewhere, Gregory reinforced his point that domestic conflict could be stirred by the advent of a stepmother, in a manner reminiscent of his account of Fredegund and her purging of the rival branches of the family. Sigismund, King of Burgundy, had remarried following the death of his wife, Ostrogotha, and this was unfortunate for her son, Sigistrix, since his new stepmother began to harass and abuse him – 'as is the way

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[88] On stepmothers and mothers-in-law as divisive factors in the royal household, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 110-111; and Wood, 'Kings', p. 14.

[89] For the view that Chilperic's sons by Audovera may have felt threatened by the existence of a new queen, and the possibility that their branch of the family would be disenfranchised, see Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 167. On usurpers marrying the widows of a predecessor, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 49-50. On Brunhild and Merovech, see Janet Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', reprinted in *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 1-48 (pp. 10-12); and Ewig, 'Studien', p. 33.

[90] Hist. 5.39. On the deaths of Fredegund's two sons, see Hist. 5.34. On the reading of this passage as indicating that the girl was 'impaled', see Shanzer, 'History', pp. 409-410.

[91] Hist. 5.39, '*Ecce, mortous fratres meus, ad me restitit omne regnum; mihi universae Galliae subicientur, imperiumque universum mihi fata largita sunt! Ecce inimicis in manu positus inferam quaecumque placuerit!*'

of stepmothers,' Gregory added.[92] Sigistrix decided to confront his stepmother, when he noticed that she was wearing his late mother's garments during a liturgical celebration, shouting: 'You are not worthy to have such cloths cover your back, since they belonged to your *domina* – my mother.'[93] Offended and enraged, Sigistrix's stepmother devised a way to rid herself of this troublesome stepson: she cleverly told Sigismund that his son planned to usurp the kingdom, and Sigismund, 'heeding the council of his evil wife', got his son drunk on wine until he passed out, and then instructed two servants to strangle him.[94] Although Gregory thought that Sigismund's fears were unfounded, Sigistrix had a fair claim to merit authority in Burgundy and Italy, since he was a grandson of the sonless Theodoric (through his mother, Ostrogotha). Of course, he was not inventing the murderous event, which is also attested by Marius of Avenches, but his decision to blame Sigistrix's unnamed stepmother is best interpreted as a commentary on the trouble caused when a king took a new wife.[95] The trouble that Sigismund faced within his household, therefore, was no different than that faced by Chilperic, Guntram, or Chlothar, and such trouble ultimately resulted, in Gregory's view, from the decision of a king to take a bride who lacked the qualities that he thought were essential.

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[92] Hist. 3.5, '...*quae valide contra filium eius, sicut novercarum mos est, malignari ac scandalizare coepit.*' On Sigismund's marriage to Ostrogotha, see Danuta Shanzer, 'Two Clocks and a Wedding: Theuderic's Diplomatic Relations with the Burgundians', *Romanobarbarica*, 14 (1999), 225-258 (at pp. 225-227).

[93] Hist. 3.5, '*Non enim eras digna, ut haec indumenta tua terga contegerent, quae dominae tuae, id est matre meae, fuisse nuscuntur.*' On the motif of the evil stepmother in literature, see Arjava, *Women*, pp. 172-177; David Noy, 'Wicked Stepmothers in Roman Society and Imagination', *Journal of Family History*, 16 (1991), 345-361; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), pp. 155-159; M. Grey-Fow, 'The Wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: An Evaluation', *Latomus*, 47 (1988), 741-757 (at 741-749); and Michel Humbert, *Le remariage à Rome: Étude d'histoire juridique et sociale* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1972), pp. 195-204. On the Sigistrix episode in the *Historiae*, see Wood, 'Misremembering', pp. 145-146.

[94] Hist. 3.5, '*uxoris iniquae consilium utens.*' On the *furor* of Sigismund's second wife, see Rosenwein, 'Writing', p. 27.

[95] Marius of Avenches, *Chronica, anno* 522. On Sigismund and his religious activity, see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 51-53; Wood, 'Latin', p. 373, and Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus*, pp. 376-381. For his cult (which Gregory mentioned in GM 74), see Paxton, 'Power'; and Friedrich Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich: Kultur und Gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am Beispiel der monastischen Entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert) Mit einem Kartenanhang* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1965), pp. 102-112.

The Criteria for a Worthy Royal Bride

Gregory clearly made a distinction between worthy and unworthy brides based on a set of criteria, which he preferred to present through entertaining and morally informative narratives, rather than in a systematic list. There are, of course, occasions when Gregory listed some of the qualities present in a good wife, as when he praised Chlothild as graceful, intelligent, and of royal birth, or as when he praised Brunhild as lovely, upright, beautiful, discerning, charming, royal, and graceful.[96] But, even in these two examples, the list of qualities fails to encompass all of their positive attributes, which only become clear as the narrative develops, as is the case with their adherence to the Catholic faith. Similarly, the hallmarks of a poor choice in bride are only discernable by analysing the traits that appear in Gregory's stories: low birth, imprudence, and lack of Christian morals. Gregory's set of criteria is also indicated by his omissions, since he tended to pass over information that was inconsistent with his bivalent categorisation of brides as good or bad, in keeping with his theme on proper royal marital policy.

The bad brides in Gregory's narrative were almost always of low birth. Gregory described Ingund as an *ancilla* and *famula*, Aregund as a *serva*, Marcovefa and Merofled as the daughters of a woolworker, and Theudogild as a shepherd's daughter.[97] Guntram's concubine Veneranda had also been an *ancilla*, and Sigistrix's stepmother had replaced her former *domina*, when she had become Sigismund's wife, at least according to her son's outburst.[98] Fredegund, also, seems to have been of servile origin, since, according to Gregory, her daughter Rigunth insulted her by saying that she was the real *domina* and that Fredegund owed her *servitio*.[99] In other words, Rigunth thought that she derived her royal status from her father, King Chilperic, rather than her servile mother. There is some confirmation for this in the *Liber historiae Francorum*, which included a story explaining how Fredegund moved from the rank of slave to queen by ousting Audovera from her position at the king's side.[100] Gregory also made

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[96] Hist. 2.28, 4.27.

[97] Hist. 4.3, 5.20, 4.26.

[98] Hist. 3.5, 4.25.

[99] Hist. 9.34. See also Merta, 'Helena', p. 11.

[100] LHF 31, 'Nam ipsa Fredegundis ex familia infirma fuit.' This information, however, appeared within a narrative of dubious historicity. According to the LHF, Fredegund tricked Audovera into serving as the godmother of her own daughter, thereby making her an ineligible sexual

sure to praise the noble origins of the queens he held in high regard, such as Chlothild, Brunhild, and Galswinth. Ingoberg's high birth is readily apparent in her efforts to cool her husband's passions for two domestic servants by reminding him of their base origins, which could only have made sense if she herself were noble.

Not every wife that suffered Gregory's disapproval was of low birth, although one would have a difficult time discerning this from his narrative. For example, Gregory mentioned that Chlothar's marriage to Wuldetrada had been condemned by the Gallic episcopate, yet he passed over the fact that Wuldetrada was the offspring of a Lombard king and a Gepid princess.[101] Similarly, Gregory criticised Chlothar for marrying the widow of his late brother, Guntheuca, without mentioning her background, though there are reasons to believe that she was of Burgundian royal stock.[102] Gregory had little to say of Chramn's wife Chalda, except that her father accidentally set fire to St. Martin's church in Tours, but it is possible that he had been a *Comes* of Orléans.[103] Presumably, Marcatrude was also freeborn, since she was the daughter of a slave-owning aristocrat, although this must be inferred from incidental references to her family's ownership of property, and the implication is not especially evident in Gregory's narrative.[104] This tendency to avoid mentioning the backgrounds of well-born yet ultimately bad wives contrasts dramatically with his consistent emphasis on the status of servile brides, and it is best seen as part of Gregory's greater theme on proper royal marital policy.

Gregory's rationale for believing that lowborn women were more likely to cause problems in the royal household must remain elusive, unfortunately, since his preference for short narratives meant that he never presented his reasoning

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partner for her husband, since spiritual kinship (as a godparent) fell under ecclesiastical prohibitions against incest. However, the canonical regulations defining spiritual kinship in this way are no earlier than the eighth century; see Fleury, *Recherches*, pp. 84-113, 154; Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 144; and Johann Loebell, *Gregor von Tours und seine Zeit*, 2nd edn (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1869), p. 23.

[101] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 1.21; Hist. 4.9.

[102] Hist. 3.6; Ewig, 'Namengebung', pp. 26-27, 42-43.

[103] Hist. 4.17. The name of Chramn's wife as Chalda derives from LHF, 28. On her father (Wilichar) as the *Comes* of Orléans, see Rouche, *L'Aquitaine*, p. 63. On the possible identification of Wilichar with a priest of the same name instead, see William McDermott, *Gregory of Tours: Selections from the Minor Works* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), p. 50, n. 81.

[104] Hist. 5.17; 5.20.

systematically. However, a gendered explanation may be eliminated from the list of possibilities, since Gregory seems to have held lowborn grooms with the same disdain, as is evident in his highly inaccurate account of the marriage arrangements of Clovis's niece, Amalasuntha. According to him, since Amalasuntha was the daughter of Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, she was destined to marry a prince (*filius regis*) – or at least these were the plans of her mother, Audofleda. However, Amalasuntha fell in love with a slave named Traguilla, much to the dismay of Audofleda, who pleaded with her daughter not to humiliate her nobility of birth (*nobile genus*), and to dismiss the slave in favour of a man of royal lineage (*genus regium*). When Amalasuntha instead eloped with Traguilla, Audofleda had her beaten and returned to her household, and she had Traguilla killed. In revenge, Amalasuntha murdered her mother by poisoning the chalice she drank from during Communion. Gregory was explicit in expressing his opinions on the matter, describing Amalasuntha's decision to elope with Traguilla as an act of levity (*per levitatem animi sui*), and her murder of her own mother as diabolical.[105] Gregory's comments are especially conspicuous given the inaccuracy of his information: Amalasuntha had actually been married to the distinguished Flavius Eutharic Cilliga, precisely because her father Theodoric valued Eutharic's royal lineage. [106] Even if Gregory relied on another source for his information, the vehemence with which he attacked Amalasuntha must be considered his own, and it indicates that he considered anyone of low birth, male or female, to be an unfitting choice of spouse for a royal, even if, in practice, only the latter was likely to occur.

Gregory also emphasised the moral character of each royal partner, and it is little surprise that the worthy brides, such as Chlothild and Galswinth, enjoyed saintly status in his works. Gregory also made great efforts to avoid slandering Brunhild's character, a point that will be of particular concern in the next two chapters of this study. The unfitting partners, likewise, were distinguished by their moral shortcomings. For example, Marcatrude poisoned the son of her rival, Austrechild,

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[105] Hist. 3.31. Gregory also mentioned Theodoric in GM 39. On the episode, see Shanzer, 'History', p. 397, n. 18.

[106] On the genealogy of Eutharic and its place in Ostrogothic politics, see Peter Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun Domination', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 79 (1989), 103-128; and Wilhelm Ensslin, *Theoderich der Grosse*, 2nd edn (Munich: Münchner, 1959), pp. 80-86.

who then in turn arranged for the death of several innocent people.[107] Marcovefa forsook her religious vows in favour of the marriage bed, only to suffer excommunication, followed by an unexpected and divinely ordained death.[108] Theudogild refused to accept political insignificance in her widowhood, preferring remarriage even if it meant that she had to travel to Spain and be wed to a Visigoth, who was presumably an Arian heretic. The widows Wuldetrada and Guntheuca were both willing to marry Chlothar, who was an in-law of their late husbands, in spite of ecclesiastical disapproval of such unions. And, of course, Fredegund was very much the epitome of an amoral woman, and her role as the great villainess of the *Historiae* will be analysed in detail in the following chapter of this study.

It is worth emphasising one particular quality absent from Gregory's criteria for a fitting royal spouse: he apparently did not regard a woman's ability to produce male offspring as a necessary attribute. Gregory was, of course, quite interested in the issue of royal heirs within the context of Merovingian marital policy, but he usually limited his discussion to the simple point that kings who sired potential heirs from multiple women inevitability brought political instability to the realm. Of course, Gregory did blame Guntram's lack of children on his immoral approach to marriage, but this was not due to the infertility of any of his wives, since his offspring had either been murdered or stricken by disease, suggesting that God had punished the sinful king by leaving him childless (*absque liberis*).[109] Moreover, Gregory thought well of Ingoberg, Radegund, and Galswinth, even though they gave their husbands no sons. Likewise, the fact that Ingund, Aregund, Veneranda, Marcatrude, Austrechild, Theudogild, and Fredegund had all given birth to sons failed to save them from Gregory's disdain. Perhaps this is best seen as a reminder that the political troubles of sixth-century Gaul were far more likely to result from an abundance of Merovingian heirs, rather than from a paucity.[110] Even Clovis had found it necessary to hunt down excess male relatives, who could potentially press a claim to succeed to the throne.[111]

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[107] Hist. 4.25; 5.35.

[108] Hist. 4.26.

[109] Gregory's interpretation is somewhat contradicted by the appearance, in passing, of a surviving daughter, see Hist. 5.17, 5.20, and 9.20.

[110] Wood, 'Kings', p. 10. On the Merovingians' need to prune their family tree, see Wood, 'Deconstructing'. In a parallel example, the position of Byzantine empresses in this period does

Gregory's set of criteria for a worthy royal bride are rather similar to one given by his younger contemporary, Isidore of Seville, who wrote that, 'in selecting a wife, four things inspire a man to love: her beauty (*pulchritudo*), her heredity (*genus*), her wealth (*divitae*), and her character (*mores*); although it is better to search after character than wealth, nowadays men are more interested in a bride's wealth and looks (*forma*) than her upright morals (*probitas morum*).'[112] Gregory also considered Christian morals, high birth, and, with less emphasis, graceful beauty (*elegantia, venustas*, etc.) to be marks of a fitting partner. His views on the importance of *divitae* are less clear, but he did mention the *magnus thesaurus* that both Brunhild and Galswinth brought with them from Spain.[113] It is possible to find this same list in a much older, Greco-Roman attitude, evidenced, for example, by Jerome's use of the criteria given by the ancient philosopher Theophrastus that a wise man would look for a bride who was beautiful (*pulchra*), had good morals (*bene morata*), and had a distinguished lineage (*honestis parentibus*).[114] Gregory's opinions, therefore, can be understood, not only as a reaction to contemporary circumstances, but also as the expression of the values of an upper class culture with deep roots in the classical past.

Of course, it could be said that Gregory's criteria derived, most fundamentally, from common sense, and that the qualities of beauty, birth, money, and morals were simply ubiquitous ideals. However, it should be stressed that the Merovingian kings themselves, with few exceptions, had a rather different list of desirable qualities. Low birth, for example, had its advantages, since it allowed a king to take a bride without political connections, thereby avoiding the risk of being seen to favour one political

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not seem to have been especially bound up in their ability to produce offspring; see James, *Empresses*, pp. 65, 164.

[111] Hist. 2.42. On Gregory's use of Judges 3:15-26 in this passage, see Louis Halphen, 'Grégoire de Tours, historien de Clovis', in *Mélanges d'histoire du Moyen Age offerts a M. Ferdinand Lot* (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1925), pp. 235-245 (at p. 242).

[112] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 9.7.29, '*Item in eligenda uxore quattour res inpellunt hominem ad amorem: pulchritudo, genus, divitae, more. Melius tamen si in ea mores quam pulchritudo quaeratur. Nunc autem illae quarentur quas aut divitiae aut forma, non quas probitas morum commendat.*'

[113] Hist. 4.27-28.

[114] Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum libri duo*, PL, 23, 1.47, '*...si pulchra esset, si bene morata, si honestis parentibus, si ipse sanus ac dives, sic sapientem inire aliquando matriomnium.*' On the ubiquity with which the criteria of beauty, birth, and wealth were held as requisites for a bride in classical antiquity, see Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 85-119.

faction over another.[115] Even when Merovingian kings did take highborn brides, they usually avoided drawing women from the ranks of the Gallic aristocracy, instead preferring foreign princesses.[116] Likewise, elevating a girl from slave to queen demonstrated one's own power and status – 'freedom from the rules that bound noble society,' in the words of Pauline Stafford.[117] Only a truly wealthy man could afford to select a bride without any consideration of her financial assets. Merovingian kings also seem to have had a different idea about moral conduct, and, although they surely expected certain scruples, such as sexual fidelity, from their wives, it is clear that some queens, like Fredegund, were permitted to conduct themselves in a manner that Gregory found appalling.

Presumably, Gregory's attitudes are indicative of those belonging to his episcopal colleagues in general, especially those who had a similar cultural background. He was not the only one, for example, who protested against Chlothar's marriage to Wuldetrada, or Childebert's marriage to Marcovefa, as both found ecclesiastical censure.[118] And Sagittarius's insistence that Guntram disinherit his sons on account of their mother's low birth suggests that others disapproved of lowborn queens.[119] Nonetheless, Gregory's view cannot be taken to represent the entire Merovingian episcopate, and certain bishops approved of the same marital habits that disturbed him so much. Some bishops had strong familial connections to the ruling house, such as Bertram, Bishop of Bordeaux, who was related to Guntram, and these bishops were naturally more likely to support a king's choice of bride.[120] Indeed, if one assumes that Merovingian weddings were presided over by a bishop, then it follows that for each marriage there was at least one bishop who approved of the union enough to lead the liturgical ceremonies. Unfortunately, the details of Merovingian marital rites are exceptionally obscure, but scattered references from Gaul in the fifth and sixth century hint at a marriage ceremony, conducted in the presence of a priest or

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[115] Wood, 'Deconstructing', pp. 168-169.

[116] On marriage to a foreign bride as an avoidance of local politics, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 41-43. On Merovingians marrying into the aristocracy, see Karl Eckhardt, *Studia Merovingica* (Aalen: Scientia, 1975), pp. 186-214.

[117] Stafford, *Queens*, p. 38.

[118] Hist. 4.9; 4.26.

[119] Hist. 5.20.

[120] On Bertram's relation to Guntram, see Hist. 8.3; 9.33.

bishop.[121] For example, Praetextatus, Bishop of Rouen, presided over Brunhild's marriage to Merovech, even though their union violated canonical prohibitions.[122]

Whatever the case, one may assume that the marital practices of Merovingian kings found supporters among the bishops. Indeed, it is even possible to locate Gregory himself in this context. He had been appointed Bishop of Tours by Sigibert, Brunhild, and Radegund, so it is perhaps little surprise to find him praising Sigibert's marriage to Brunhild, and criticising Chlothar's marital policy, which included the dismissal of Radegund in favour of other, less fitting brides. This point is not intended as an indulgence in cynicism, as Gregory clearly was a man of principle, but his opinions, even if derived from ancient wisdom and eternal truth, still applied within a political context. Indeed, Gregory's narrative takes its distinctive character from his desire to correlate moral principles with historical circumstances. Likewise, his theme on royal marital policy is significant exactly because of its political relevance. Gregory wished to show that Christian morals, as they had been absorbed by the senatorial class to which he belonged, served as the guide for successful kingship. His desire to prove this with historical examples led him, inevitably, to manage his material in a way that resulted in certain inaccuracies and omissions, or at least intentional ambiguity. This by-product of Gregory's desire to present a consistent moral theme has led to problems in subsequent scholarship. At times his inaccuracies have been taken as facts, and his vagueness has been mistaken as something other than a literary technique. This is especially apparent in scholarship that has characterised the Merovingian kings as upholding polygamy as something of a royal institution.

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[121] For the evidence, see Hen, *Culture*, pp. 131-137. Hen wrote, 'The picture which emerges from the sources is, then, of an episcopal benediction in the church, at the altar, as part of the marriage rite.' See also Cyrille Vogel, 'Les Rites de la célébration du mariage: Leur signification dans la formation du lien durant le haut Moyen Age', *Settimane*, 24 (1977), I, 397-465; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 403-411; and, for the opposing position, Korbinian Ritzer, *Formen, Riten und religiöses Brauchtum der Eheschliessung in den christlichen Kirchen des ersten Jahrtausends* (Münster: Aschendorffsche, 1962), pp. 213-214.
[122] *Hist.* 5.2; 5.18.

Merovingian Polygamy?

Because Gregory wished to emphasise the turmoil caused by the *nimium luxoriosus* of Merovingian kings, it was in his interests to dwell upon the inability of rulers such as Chlothar, Charibert, and Chilperic to value monogamy, or at least to follow it in the strictest of senses. Thus, when Gregory recounted his stories of lustful kings taking new wives, he sometimes employed a measure of ambiguity, especially concerning chronology, which gave the impression that a king had more than one wife at the same time. This has been accepted by some scholars as sufficient evidence to believe that the Merovingians were polygamous, and there have even been attempts to locate this practice in ancient Germanic custom.[123] It is possible to accept the idea that some of the Merovingian kings were polygamous, but only as long as one is willing to accept the vagueness of Gregory's language uncritically, as a reflection of the vagary with which the Merovingians absorbed the Christian understanding of marriage. However, when one considers that Gregory used ambiguity as a literary technique, in order to make his material better fit his themes on royal marital policy, it becomes difficult to use his information as a basis for accepting that the Merovingians were polygamous.[124] Furthermore, outside of Gregory's works – or, rather, outside of Book 4 of Gregory's *Historiae* – there is very little evidence to support this hypothesis. And, no matter how one views Gregory's information, there is no reason to believe that polygamy was a common practice, or that it had existed continuously since Germanic antiquity.

Even if polygamy is rejected as a descriptor of Merovingian marital practices, however, the term 'monogamy' requires some clarification, since certain kings clearly had a number of sexual partners throughout the course of their lives. The sources consistently employed two, and only two, distinct categories to classify kings' partners:

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[123] Wemple, *Women*, pp. 38-41, who wrote (p. 38), 'The combination of the Germanic polygyny and the Roman institution of concubinage gave almost complete license to men to be promiscuous, furthered male dominance, and accentuated sexual double standards in Merovingian society. As long as there were no strict requirements for the legalization of unions and the legitimization of children, polygyny continued unabated in the royal family. Four Merovingian kings, Clothar I, Charibert I, Chilperic I, and Dagobert I, are known to have indulged in this.' See also Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern Bullough and James Brandage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 123-152 (at pp. 129-130); and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Long', pp. 161, 204.

[124] Here 'polygamy' is used synonymously with the more specific, yet far more obscure term 'polygyny', i.e. the practice of having more than one wife.

the concubine (*concubina*) and the wife (*uxor* or *conjux*); only the latter could be taken in marriage (*in coniugio* or *in matrimonio*).[125] The view that Merovingians were not polygamous indicates, therefore, that a particular king only had one *uxor*, or no *uxor*, at a given time, regardless of how many *concubina* were at his side, or how many *uxores* he had (in sequence) over the course of his life. In this interpretation, the word 'mistress' presents itself as a reasonable translation of *concubina*, since it calls to mind the phenomenon prevalent in the monarchies of the modern period, which could not be regarded as polygamous. Gregory, of course, thought that kings who both kept mistresses and went through a series of wives made a mockery of the Christian understanding of marriage and fidelity, and scholarship has tended to agree: 'Merovingian writers distinguish concubines and full wives', wrote Pauline Stafford, 'Yet since polygamy recognises differences in the status of various wives, if a king has a wife and a concubine at the same time the arrangement should probably be called polygamy.'[126] In many ways this interpretation is quite reasonable, but it risks overlooking the manner in which not only kings, but also the women involved, including the mistresses, used the concept of monogamy in order to advance their own positions.

Rather than ask if the concept of polygamy can incorporate a difference of status amongst various wives, it is perhaps more useful to ask how the difference between *uxor* and *concubina* was seen within Merovingian courts that were ostensibly Christian.[127] An *uxor* enjoyed a sense of legitimacy within a moral framework that understood relationships only according to the standards of monogamy, and from this she derived certain exclusive privileges. As will be shown below, an *uxor* had access to a vast amount of wealth, including revenues from cities and estates granted to her by the king. She also enjoyed a measure of influence at court, represented by the title *regina*, and this influence had the potential to endure, even after the death of her

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[125] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'The History of Marriage and the Myth of Friedelehe', in *EME*, 14 (2006), 119-151 (at pp. 145-147); cf. Stafford, *Queens*, p. 128.

[126] Stafford, *Queens*, p. 73. See also Verdon, 'Femmes', pp. 246-247; and Martina Hartmann, 'Concubina vel regina? Zu einigen Ehefrauen und Konkubinen der karolingischen Könige', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 63 (2007), 545-568 (at pp. 555-556).

[127] The notion that the Merovingian kings were half-pagan is mostly a Carolingian idea; see Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 107-113. On the Christian quality of Merovingian kingship, see Eugen Ewig, 'Zum christlichen Königsgedanken im Frühmittelalter', in *Das Königtum: Seine geistigen und rechtlichen Grundlagen* (Lindau und Konstanz: Thorbecke, 1956), pp. 7-74 (at pp. 18-24).

husband, in the form of guardianship over minor children. And, while a concubine may also have received some gifts from the king, or made important contacts, there is no evidence that this ever happened on a level anywhere near that of an *uxor*. Similarly, those wives dismissed by their royal husbands occasionally remained politically relevant, while concubines never did, unless they later married the king. Even on matters where the two seem equal, such as the inheritance of children, an *uxor* had a distinct advantage. Some objected to the sons of concubines inheriting a share in the kingdom, and although this did happen, it was also common for a wife to use her courtly influence and access to wealth to disenfranchise the offspring of other women. In all respects, therefore, the concubine was in a disadvantageous position, and the only successful concubine was the one who eventually became a wife, acquiring a set of privileges that she then had every interest in seeing remain exclusive to herself. Thus, even if kings had numerous sexual partners, it was the concepts of monogamy and exclusivity, that held political currency – which were used by the women involved for their own advantage.

It will be necessary to return to the privileges due to a wife later on. First, however, and with all of the above in mind, it is possible to turn to the three passages in Book 4 of Gregory's *Historiae* that have traditionally been used to support the idea that the Merovingians were polygamous. Gregory's story about Ingund and Aregund, mentioned above, suggests that Chlothar was wed to the sisters simultaneously, at least for a brief period, since the king married Aregund before returning to inform his wife Ingund of the new arrangements. The abrupt end of Gregory's narrative, furthermore, left open the possibility that Ingund had stayed married to Chlothar after his return, since she pleaded, 'let be done what seems good in the eyes of my lord, only let [me], your handmaid, live with the favour of the king.'[128] The request to remain *cum gratia regis* can be read as a disheartened request to remain married to Chlothar, even if it meant sharing the role with Aregund. On the other hand, since Ingund was a former *ancilla*, her plea may simply have been a request to keep her free status.

Rather than resolve the ambiguity of Gregory's language, it may be more profitable to understand its literary function. Gregory failed to give Chlothar's

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[128] Hist. 4.3, '*Quod bonum, inquid, videtur in oculis domini mei, faciat; tantum ancilla tua cum gratia regis vivat.*'

response to Ingund's vague plea, and this uncertainty called attention to Chlothar's unpredictability, which Gregory considered to be the character flaw of a monarch defined by his *nimium luxoriosus*. Moreover, the structure of Gregory's narrative required him to imply that Chlothar had been married to two women simultaneously, since the entertaining twist of the story would have been ruined if Gregory had paused to state that Chlothar had divorced Ingund before fulfilling her request to find her sister a worthy spouse by marrying Aregund himself.[129] Indeed, Gregory's story actually suggests that polygamy was not an accepted practice of the Merovingians, since, if it had been, Ingund would have had no reason to feel threatened by Chlothar's marriage to her sister, whether or not her plea to remain *cum gratia regis* referred to divorce or enforced servitude.

Another way that Gregory disparaged Chlothar's marital policy was through his emphasis of the king's high number of partners: Ingund, Aregund, Chunsina, Guntheuca, Radegund, and Wuldetrada.[130] Gregory used this extensive list of sexual partners to support his characterisation of Chlothar as exceedingly licentious, and some historians have concurred. Suzanne Fonay Wemple, for example, thought that the chronology of these marriages was suggestive of 'polygyny rather than serial monogamy'.[131] In particular, Wemple was doubtful of the chronological reconstruction forwarded by Eugen Ewig, who worked under the assumption that Chlothar had practiced monogamy, and that his sons had been born in wedlock or close to it, in order to overcome Gregory's lack of chronological details and arrive at a reconstruction of the dates for the king's marriages.[132] There is, however, nothing inherently implausible about Ewig's chronological reconstruction. According to his calculations, Chlothar was first married to Ingund from about 517 to 523, then Guntheuca until around 530, and then Ingund again until he married Aregund no later

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[129] On the literary charm of the passage, see Shanzer, 'History', p. 412.

[130] The unnamed mother of Gundovald might also be added to the list, depending on how one views the legitimacy of his claim. Gregory seems to have accepted Gundovald's legitimacy, see Goubert, *Byzance*, I, 41; Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, p. 234; Rouche, *L'Aquitaine*, p. 74; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 263-264; Wood, 'Deconstructing', pp. 161-162; Wood, 'Secret', pp. 264-265; and Bachrach, *Anatomy*, pp. 6-8. Similarly, Rauching also claimed to be a son of Chlothar (Hist. 9.9).

[131] Wemple, *Women*, p. 38.

[132] Ewig, 'Studien', pp. 29-36.

than 536. By 540, Chlothar had replaced Aregund with Chunsina, and, at some point after this, he married Radegund until, in the early 550s, he married Wuldetrada.[133]

The most strained part of Ewig's chronology is the period between 537 and 540, when Chlothar swapped Aregund for Chunsina, and then Chunsina for Radegund. Some of the tension can be relieved, however, by observing that Gregory never actually described Chunsina as a wife, and so there is no express need to squeeze her between Aregund and Radegund. Instead, Chlothar may simply have had an offspring from the mistress Chunsina during his marriage to Aregund. Chlothar's marriage to Radegund may also help to explain the king's preference for her lowborn predecessors Ingund and Aregund. According to Gregory, the Thuringian princess had been taken by Chlothar as part of the spoils of the Thuringian campaign of 531, and Venantius Fortunatus added that Radegund had been a young girl at the time, and that she was sent to Chlothar's villa at Athies to be raised by *custodes*.[134] Thus, Chlothar may have wished to leave the option of marrying the princess open during the 530s, in case this proved to be politically worthwhile in the future, and for this reason he took only the lowborn, and more easily dismissible Ingund and Aregund in the meantime.[135] A similar incident occurred in 560, when the *vir nobilis* Ceraonius seized the five-year-old *clarissima*, Rusticula, and brought her into his household, where she was to be raised, 'so that he could marry her when she had reached the age of majority,' although he later decided against the union.[136] In fact, Chlothar may have followed the same policy from the outset, when he had first married Ingund around 517, only to dismiss her for Guntheuca, who was possibly of royal stock.[137]

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[133] Ewig also added the possibility of Gundovald's mother, which he dated to around 550, after Chlothar's short marriage to Wuldetrada. A date in the mid-540s for Gundovald's birth was preferred by Goffart, 'Byzantine', p. 99, n. 114.

[134] Hist. 3.7; Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 2.

[135] On the repudiation of a wife in Late Antiquity, see Arjava, *Women*, pp. 177-189; Judith Evans-Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's Marriage Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 242-253; Ingrid Heidrich, 'Besitz und Besitzverfügung verheirateter und verwitweter freier Frauen im merowingischen Frankenreich', in *Weibliche Lebensgestaltung im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Hans-Werner Goetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991), pp. 119-138; Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 79-86; Wemple, *Women*, pp. 42-43.

[136] *Vita Rusticulae sive Marciae abbatissae Arelatensis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM, 4 (Hannover, 1902), 3, '...ut cum ad legitimam pervenisset aetatem, sibi eam matrimonio copularet.' Her birth status is related in the first chapter of the *vita*.

[137] Ewig, 'Studien', p. 35.

Of course, it was not in Gregory's interests to identify well-reasoned political considerations as an explanation for Chlothar's marital policy, since he wished to present the king as making decisions based solely on whimsy and lust. There can be little doubt, however, that Chlothar took political circumstances into consideration, at least when he married the Lombard princess Wuldetrada around 555, given the tensions between the Merovingians and the Lombards at the time.[138] Indeed, once Chlothar's marital policy is seen as a rational and well-planned policy, executed throughout the course of his reign, then it becomes possible to reappraise the significance of his number of wives. Five wives and one mistress may seem a daunting total, but they spanned a reign of fifty years (511-561).[139] The notion that Chlothar was exceedingly licentious, therefore, has resulted more from Gregory's literary skill, than from the sheer number of partners that he identified. Nonetheless, more than one scholar has been enchanted by Gregory's charm; Samuel Dill, for example, claimed that, '[Chlothar's] harem was on the scale of Baghdad or Constantinople,' and, much more recently, Dick Harrison asserted that, 'we can easily imagine [Chlothar's] court of the kingdom of Soissons as an archetypal Barbarian harem.'[140] Much to the contrary, Chlothar's court should neither be seen as a barbarian harem nor, even, as archetypal, since Chlothar was clearly exceptional.

The king that came closest to Chlothar was, at least according to Gregory, Charibert, although his account of this king is characterised by the same degree of imprecision. Although Charibert clearly repudiated his first wife, Ingoberg (*reliquit Ingobergam*), before marrying Merofled, it is not so obvious from Gregory's narrative that he dispensed with Theudogild when he married Marcovefa.[141] This is because Gregory wrote that, when Charibert died, Theudogild offered herself and her wealth to Guntram, in a bid to stay politically relevant, which suggests that she had remained so

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[138] See Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. by Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 283-284.

[139] One might add one or two additional concubines, depending on the claims of Gundobad and Rauching mentioned above.

[140] Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London: MacMillan, 1926), p. 372; Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens. Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic, 1998), p. 86.

[141] Wemple, *Women*, p. 39. Theudogild's status as a wife of Charibert is evident only from Gregory's statement that she had been one of Charibert's queens (*una reginarum eius*). When Fredegar copied this passage, he clarified the ambiguity by calling Theudogild an *uxor* (3.56).

up to this point, even though Charibert had subsequently taken Marcovefa to wed.[142] Gregory's chronology, however, was dictated by his literary concerns, since he wished to present the king's untimely death as a result of the excommunication he incurred from marrying Marcovefa, a nun and sister of his former wife Merofled.[143] Gregory only located Theudogild's position in Charibert's sequence of wives with the vague, *habuit et aliam puellam... Theudogildem*, void of chronological markers. Likewise, his reference to Theudogild's bid to remain politically relevant, which has the trappings of an anecdotal tale, fit two of his other themes: that Theudogild was an example of what not to do upon becoming a widow, as discussed in the previous chapter of this study, and that Guntram's marital policy had been as bad as his brother's. Given the extent to which Gregory's account of Charibert's marriages was dictated by his literary concerns, any attempt to use his vague chronology as a basis for believing that the king was polygamous must be regarded as dubious at best.

The final instance where Gregory's language raised the possibility of polygamy occurred in his account of King Chilperic, who happened to be the king whom he most thoroughly condemned, later labelling him as the 'Nero and Herod of our Time'.[144] According to Gregory, when Chilperic decided to marry Galswinth, in imitation of his brother Sigibert's good choice, he already had several wives (*cum iam plures haberet uxores*), and he was required to repudiate these wives (*alias relicturus*) before his marriage to the princess. Gregory mentioned only two of these former partners by name: Fredegund, *quam prius habuerat*, and Audovera, *priore regina sua*.[145] Gregory's terminology is certainly indicative of the charge of polygamy, emphasising his point that Chilperic had employed a reckless marital policy until he was inspired by

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[142] Hist. 4.26.

[143] Gregory was not clear about the reason for the excommunication. Marcovefa had been both a nun and an in-law of the king, and either (or both) of these facts could have justified the ecclesiastical censure. For the interpretation that the excommunication was for incest (and not for bigamy), see Wood, 'Incest', p. 302 and n. 77; Ewig, 'Studien', p. 30; Fritz Kern, *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandsrecht im frühen Mittelalter: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Monarchie* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1954), p. 339; Voigt, *Staat*, p. 295; and Eduard Eichmann, 'Das Excommunikationsprivileg das deutschen Kaisers im Mittelalter', ZSR KA, 1 (1911), 160-194 (at p. 162).

[144] Hist. 6.46, '*Nero nostri temporis et Herodis*'. On Gregory's presentation of Chilperic, see Halsall, 'Nero', pp. 340-342, 347-350; Wood, 'Secret', pp. 254-259; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 222-224; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 235-237; Bund, *Thronsturz*, pp. 270-271; Reydellet, *La Royauté*, pp. 419, 448; Wallace-Hadrill, 'Long-Haired', p. 195; and Dalton, *History*, I, 62-67.

[145] Hist. 4.28.

Sigibert's noble example. There are, however, some odd aspects of Gregory's account, which ended when Chilperic again fell victim to his lust, arranging for Galswinth to be murdered so that he could remarry Fredegund. It is curious that, after abandoning his attempts to follow Sigibert's example, the king apparently remained faithful to Fredegund for seventeen years, from 567 to his death in 584, even though he had not felt compelled to do so when married to the same woman previously. It is even more curious that Chilperic chose Fredegund, who had yet to give him any children, over Audovera, who had given him three sons and a daughter between the years 552 and 565.[146] His decision led to turmoil, as Fredegund endeavoured, successfully, to wipe out this alternate branch of the royal family. If Chilperic had really been married to both Fredegund and Audovera simultaneously before, why would he not return to the same policy after murdering Galswinth?

Elsewhere, Gregory was quite comfortable raising the issue of sexual deviance in order to slander an individual, even when the charge was quite improbable. For example, Gregory gave an incriminating account of the *matrona* Deuteria, who, he suggested, had married King Theudebert even though she already had a husband.[147] This occurred when Deuteria surrendered the city of Cabrières to Theudebert, during one of the king's campaigns, while her husband was away in Béziers. The king entered the city and saw that Deuteria was beautiful, so he took her to bed (*eam copulavit*).[148] Gregory added that Theudebert later married the woman, without ever saying that Deuteria had left her husband.[149] Gregory's charge was serious: if she had slept with Theudebert while she was still married to her husband, then she would have been guilty of adultery, a crime punishable by death.[150] Even if she had left her husband before this liaison, she would still have been due a capital sentence, unless the

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[146] Ewig, 'Studien', pp. 33-34.

[147] On Deuteria, see Zöllner, *Geschichte*, p. 90; Irsigler, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 105-106; Merta, 'Helena', pp. 6-7, 25; and Rudolf Buchner, 'Das merowingische Königtum', in *Königtum*, pp. 143-154 (pp. 146-148).

[148] Hist. 3.22.

[149] Hist. 3.23.

[150] The punishment of death for adultery, and for women who simply left their husbands, appears in *Liber constitutionum*, 34, 68; *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, 21, 25; and *Codex Theodosianus*, 3.16.1-2. The *Codex Theodosianus*, which presumably would have applied to the Gallo-Roman Deuteria, allowed for women to leave their husbands under certain conditions, but they were forbidden remarriage for a period afterwards, and any unions conducted during the meantime were considered adulterous. See also Hist. 5.32, 6.36, 8.19.

separation had been orchestrated by either the unnamed husband or King Theudebert (rather than Deuteria herself), and this is precisely the information that Gregory withheld. Gregory's silence, in his efforts to disparage Deuteria, meant that his account implied that Deuteria had never separated from her first husband. Following the same logic as has been applied to Gregory's account of the aforementioned kings, one would naturally conclude that Deuteria had been polyandrous. But it is clearly absurd to suggest, based on this account, that the *matronae* in Gaul were able to marry two men (one being a king) at the same time.

Instead, Gregory's vague chronology should be seen simply as a literary technique employed in his efforts to slander Deuteria, whom he loathed. Gregory clearly disliked the woman, writing that she had drowned her daughter, because she feared that Theudebert might replace her with a younger version of herself.[151] Gregory noted: '[Deuteria] put her daughter in a sedan, yoked to two wild oxen (*indomitis bubus conjunctis*), and sent her over a bridge – the girl died in the river, near Verdun.'[152] In contrast to his imprecise language regarding Deuteria's marriages, Gregory showed his linguistic precision in this story. The word *conjungo*, which Gregory used to describe how Deuteria had yoked her daughter's carriage to the wild oxen, can also be used in reference to sexual intercourse, and it is closely related to *conjugo*, meaning 'to marry'. The pun gave a sense of irony to the passage, since the innocent girl was attached to the oxen due to her mother's fear that she would attach herself to Theudebert. Gregory's use of linguistic subtlety suggests that his ambiguous description of Deuteria's marital status was no accident, and that, likewise, his description of the marriages of Chlothar, Charibert, and Chilperic should be understood in the context of the literary objectives of each passage in question. In another way, Gregory's story of Deuteria and Theudebert further suggests that Merovingian kings did not practice polygamy, since Deuteria's fear that her daughter might replace her as the king's *uxor* makes the most sense in a context where the rank of *uxor* was exclusive. Elsewhere, Gregory gave confirmation that Theudebert practiced monogamy, when he wrote that the king had refused to marry the Lombard princess Wisigard, as his father had

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151 Hist. 3.26.

152 Hist. 3.26, '... *in basterna posita, indomitis bubus conjunctis, eam de ponte praecipitavit; quae in ipso flumine spiritum reddidit. Hoc apud Viridunum civitatem actum est.*'

arranged, because he preferred Deuteria, until, after seven years and under pressure from his *Franci*, he repudiated Deuteria (*relicta Deuteria*) and married Wisigard.[153]

Once Gregory's passages on Chlothar, Charibert, and Chilperic in Book 4 of the *Historiae* are called into question as evidence for the existence of Merovingian polygamy, almost no support for the hypothesis remains, apart from the two narrative sources that copied from Gregory's passages, Fredegar's *Chronicae* and the *Liber historiae Francorum*.[154] Fredegar, admittedly, wrote that Dagobert's concubines, 'were so numerous that it would be too cumbersome to name them all in this chronicle', and he was less than clear about the chronology of the king's three wives: Nantechild, Wulfegund, and Berchild.[155] But there is nothing in Fredegar's account that is particularly suggestive of polygamy, and, at any rate, his ambiguity regarding the marriages of his *bête noir* may have drawn some inspiration from Gregory's literary techniques. Of course, to suggest that the implication of polygamy found in the *Historiae* derives from Gregory's literary themes, rather than his candid recording of the facts, is not quite the same as proving that his information is untrue. It is possible, therefore, to believe that these few kings were polygamous, even with all of the problems relating to the material found in Book 4 of the *Historiae*. But the view that Merovingian polygamy existed as an institution with roots in ancient Germanic practice, at the least, can be entirely discounted. The hypothesis is based entirely on comments by Tacitus, who wrote that a few elite members of the *Germani* had multiple wives, though the great majority practiced monogamy.[156] The second-century Mediterranean aristocrat never observed the *Germani* directly, and he wrote his thoroughly unreliable description of Germania in order to critique his own Roman society.[157] Even if one accepts Tacitus at his word, a leap of the imagination is still required in order to see a continued tradition of polygamy unto the time of Chlothar

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[153] Hist. 3.20, 3.23, 3.27. These *Franci* were a source of debate for Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, pp. 170-175; and Irsigler, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 105-106.

[154] Book 4 was the source for the information found in Fredegar 3.46, 3.56, 3.60; and LHF 31.

[155] Fredegar 4.53, 4.58-49, and 4.60, '*Nomina concubinarum, eo quod plures fuissent, increuit huius chronice inseri.*' On Dagobert's wives, see Merta, 'Helena', pp. 15-17.

[156] Tacitus, *Germania*, 18; cf. Wemple, *Women*, pp. 10-15. On the problems with the use of 'Germanic' beyond linguistic analysis, see Walter Goffart, 'The Theme of 'the Barbarian Invasions' in Late Antiquity and Modern Historiography', reprinted in *Rome's Fall*, pp. 111-132 (p. 112); and Graus, *Volk*, pp. 23-24.

[157] Steven Fanning, 'Tacitus, Beowulf, and the Comitatus', *Haskins Society Journal*, 9 (1997), 17-38 (at pp. 33-35).

and Charibert, long after the barbarian newcomers had been immersed in a Roman, Christian cultural milieu – a leap for which there is simply no evidence.

The reason certain kings failed to practice monogamy according to Gregory's standards must be sought elsewhere than in the polygamous customs of Germanic antiquity. Indeed, even the practice of concubinage among the Merovingians, far from resembling unapologetic polygamy or, even, an oriental harem, seems to have been influenced by monogamous principles, since more than one king declined the opportunity to keep a concubine in addition to a wife. When Guntram wished to marry Marcatrude, for example, he dismissed the concubine Veneranda, which proved to be a costly show of fidelity. Likewise, when Chilperic desired to have Fredegund back, instead of simply taking her as a concubine, he had his wife killed so that he could marry her. King Chlothar had children from Ingund from 517 to 523, and then again in the mid 530s; the most reasonable explanation for the conspicuous gap is that he dismissed Ingund in order to marry Guntheuca and, apparently, did not keep her as a concubine in the meantime.[158] Sigibert seems to have gone even further, since he received praise from Fortunatus both for his fidelity to his wife and for his chastity prior the marriage.[159] There may have been others: Chlodomer and Childebert I, for example, each have only one known wife, and no known concubines. This is not to suggest that the Merovingian kings were exemplars of temperance, but it does mean that the idea of monogamy remained influential even regarding the practice of concubinage, and it should be taken as the point of departure for understanding the marital habits of the Merovingian kings – even Chlothar, Charibert, and Chilperic.

Once the sexual habits of the Merovingians are understood in terms other than simply lust and temptation, as Gregory would have it, then the exclusive benefits due to an *uxor* become especially significant, as they explain the rationale behind the actions of the kings and the women alike. Only an *uxor* enjoyed the title of *regina*, signifying a sense of legitimacy and a measure of influence at court unavailable to a concubine. Brunhild's efforts to prevent her son Childebert from marrying Theudelinda, a Frankish noblewoman (*ex genere Francorum*), for example, as well as her later efforts to prevent her grandson, Theuderic, from marrying the Visigothic princess

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[158] Ewig, 'Studien', p. 35.
[159] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 6.1.

Ermenberga, demonstrate her concern not to allow another woman into the kingdom who might challenge her position as queen.[160] Furthermore, a king's wife also had unparalleled access to wealth.[161] For example, when Chilperic sent his daughter to Spain, to be married to a Visigothic prince, his wife Fredegund gave the girl so much gold, silver, and clothing that he feared the kingdom would be left bankrupt. Fredegund assured her husband and his noblemen that she had not taken anything from the royal treasury (*thesaurus anteriorum regum*), but that the gifts had come from her own property (*de mea proprietate*), which consisted of her own assets (*de proprio congregavi*), gifts bestowed to her by the nobility (*de domibus mihi concessis*), and tax revenues that she had collected (*de fructibus quam tributis plurima reparavi*).[162] This last source of revenue is confirmed elsewhere in the *Historiae*, where Gregory wrote that the queen burned the tax lists for her cities, and then prevailed upon Chilperic to do the same for his.[163] Similarly, Queen Galswinth received revenue from five cities: Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Lescar, and Cieutat, which had been given to her as a wedding gift (*morgengabe*) by her husband Chilperic, and which, after her death, eventually passed into the hands of her sister, Brunhild, as a matter of inheritance.[164] Even if these examples are considered exceptional – and they may not have been – there is no reason to think that a concubine, no matter how generously treated, ever had access to this level of wealth.[165]

The wealth controlled by an *uxor* seems especially connected to the moment of marriage. Galswinth, though a Visigothic princess, had received her five cities as a wedding gift, and she had held them in addition to the wealth she had brought with her from Spain. Fredegund, who came from humble origins, must also have acquired her wealth upon her marriage or thereafter. The transfer of money from the groom to the bride as a condition of marriage has precedent in the *Lex Salica*, which circulated in sixth-century Gaul, as well as the *Lex Ripuaria*, which may be a century later in date. These two legal texts assumed that, as a normal part of a marriage, a husband would

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[160] Fredegar, 4.30, 4.34. See Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 132.
[161] Cf. Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 109-110.
[162] Hist. 6.45.
[163] Hist. 5.34.
[164] Hist. 9.20. On Galswinth's *morgengabe*, see Réal, 'Entre', pp. 394-396; and Régine le Jan, 'Douaires et pouvoirs des reines en Francie et en Germanie (VIe-Xe siècle)', in *Dots*, pp. 458-497 (at pp. 459-460).
[165] Galswinth's reception of five cities has been seen as exceptional by Nelson, 'A propos', p. 469.

give a financial sum to his bride, referred to as a *dos*. [166] The *Lex Ripuaria* also addressed marriages that had occurred without a *dos*, and this was used, most famously by Herbert Meyer, in support of the hypothesis that the women described as *concubinae* in the sources were, in fact, wives, taken in a different form of marriage referred to as *Friedelehe*. [167] It is now clear, to the contrary, that Merovingian legal texts envisioned only one form of marriage, which was usually observed by the transfer of the *dos*, and that the idea of *Friedelehe* is a modern myth. [168] The *dos*, then, should probably be connected with the acquisition of wealth by a woman when she became the *uxor* of the king. In other words, while there are difficulties in drawing parallels between the legal theory expressed in such codes and actual practice, it is tempting to see the transfer of a *dos* as a means by which Merovingian kings were able to publically recognised a sexual partner as an *uxor*. This, at least, was how Pope Leo I had seen the matter a century earlier, in a somewhat different context, when he had reassured a concerned father that his daughter was free to marry a man who had previously kept an unfree concubine, since, in the pontiff's eyes, this prior relationship had not been a marriage, because the concubine had not been freed and given a *dos*. [169]

It is tempting to speculate that, in the absence of any ritual for anointing a queen, the wedding itself served as the liturgical context in which a woman was elevated to the status of *regina*. [170] As mentioned above, fragmentary evidence suggests that a marriage ceremony did exist in Merovingian Gaul, which, at least for royal unions, was presided over by a bishop. Under this interpretation, which is admittedly speculative, the gift of the *dos* is seen as the legal basis for a ritual that drew upon

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[166] Karras, 'History', p. 142. Although the *dos* had referred to a dowry in imperial law, by the sixth century it had come to refer to the bride-gift, or *donatio nuptialis*; see Arjava, *Women*, pp. 52-62.

[167] Meyer, Herbert, 'Ehe und Eheauffassung der Germanen', in *Festschrift Ernst Heymann mut Unterstützung der Rechts- und Staatswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Friederich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin und Kaiser-Willhelm-Desellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften zum 70. Geburtstag am 6. April* (Weimar, 1950), pp. 1-51; and id., 'Friedelehe und Mutterrecht', in *ZSR GA*, 47 (1927), 198-286. See also Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*, pp. 271-275; Ennen, *Frauen*, pp. 35-38; and Verdon, 'Femmes', pp. 246-247.

[168] Andrea Esmyol, *Geliebte oder Ehefrau? Konkubinen im frühen Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), pp. 6-61; and Karras, 'History'.

[169] Leo I, *Ad Rusticum Narbonensum episcopum*, ed. by. P. Migne, *PL*, 54, 167.4. See Karras, 'History', p. 139; Ennen, *Frauen*, p. 35; Wemple, *Women*, pp. 12-14, 44-46; and Paul Mikat, *Dotiert Ehe – Rechte Ehe* (Opladen: Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), pp. 34-37.

[170] See Stafford, *Queens*, p. 129.

religious principles for political ends. Although based in Roman legal precedent and undertaken for pragmatic purposes, the taking of a wife was articulated in a Christian framework and, therefore, justified by a moral system developed around the concept of monogamy. Concubines had very little place in this system, which could only grant them recognition, at best, as potential wives. This helps to explain why concubines tend to feature at the side of unmarried kings, why they tend to be repudiated when and if their royal partners wed someone else, and why, on occasion, kings preferred to divorce a wife and remarry, rather than remain married and take on one or more mistresses. Most importantly, it helps to explain the actions of the women involved, who were eager to become an *uxor*, and to uphold the exclusivity of the position.

The issue of succession only intensifies these points, although it has often been interpreted to the contrary. The ability of one's children to inherit does not seem to have been one of the exclusive benefits enjoyed by an *uxor*, since there are several examples of the sons of concubines inheriting a share of the Merovingian kingdoms. At times, Gregory's statement that, 'all the males sired by kings are called sons of a king,' has been taken as some form of legal precedent on the matter, although, as mentioned above, this example does not actually refer to the issue of the legitimacy of the children, since the question at stake was not the mother's marital status (she was the king's wife), but her birth status.[171] In fact, the inheritance of illegitimate sons may have been contentious, and, in practice, there were difficulties in securing their inheritance, as evidenced by the turmoil surrounding numerous would-be kings of dubious lineage.[172] Thus, when King Theuderic II asked Desiderius whether or not he should marry his mistress, the bishop replied: 'It is better to take a wife and produce legitimate offspring.'[173] Gregory himself probably agreed with Desiderius (even if he was prepared to call the sons of servile women *regis liberi*).[174] And, though illegitimate offspring were able to inherit on occasion, a wife still had certain pragmatic advantages over a concubine on this matter. Her status, connections, and wealth allowed her every

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[171] Hist. 5.20, '*regis vocitantur liberi, qui de regibus fuerant procreati.*' Sagittarius, who had raised the original objection, later supported the usurper Gundovald, who claimed a share in the Merovingian kingdoms as a son of Chlothar from an otherwise unknown woman (Hist. 7.29).

[172] Wood, 'Kings', p. 14.

[173] *Vita Desiderii episcopi Viennensis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM, 3 (Hannover, 1896), 8, '*Bonum est uxorem accipere atque... legitimos filios procedere.*'

[174] See Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 165.

opportunity to disenfranchise the offspring of other women, as evidenced by the sinister plotting of both Marcatrude and Fredegund.[175] This issue of succession, therefore, gave kings further reason to avoid taking a concubine once married, and, in general, to keep the number of concubines low.

The dynamic that defined royal marital policy was the idea of exclusivity, even on matters where the difference between an *uxor* and a *concubina* was not institutionalised. The Merovingian courts were Christian courts, and the actions of both the kings and the women involved are best understood against this backdrop. Even those kings who, much to Gregory's disdain, displayed their power and prestige by flaunting the sexual rules that governed the rest of society nonetheless drew upon those same rules when they proved politically expedient. And, for this reason, they were never able to substitute them for some other moral framework, least of all one based on Germanic antiquity. Gregory may have thought that Chlothar and Chilperic flirted with the sin of polygamy, but, if they were guilty of anything, it was the appropriation of the idea of monogamy for political ends – not the rejection of it outright, in order to indulge their uncontrollable lust. Even the practice of concubinage seems to have been undertaken in a manner that drew inspiration from monogamous principles, and, for this reason, it is probably best not to follow Gregory's critique and regard the arrangement as akin to polygamy. Neither should the example of kings like Sigibert be overlooked, whose uncompromising sexual fidelity received the praise of more than one Gallic ecclesiastic. No matter their number of partners, the Merovingians employed marital policies based far more on rational, politically savvy insights than simply *nimium luxoriosus*, as Gregory would have it.

Conclusion

Gregory's material on the marriages of Merovingian kings, and, indeed, his account of several sixth-century wars, must be used with caution. He employed a number of techniques, from intentional ambiguity to reworked chronology, in order to better present his theme on royal marital policy. This is not to suggest that Gregory's account is divorced from the historical details. To the contrary, his narrative acquired its particular shape exactly because he sought to expose the moral lesson present in the

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[175] Hist. 4.25; 5.39. See Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 167; and Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 78-79.

historical events of sixth-century Gaul. The instability of the realm resulted, in Gregory's view, from the preference a number of kings had for lowborn, or otherwise unworthy brides, as well as their tendency to have more than one wife over the course of their reigns. Several insights can be drawn from this. Gregory was not alone in his opinions, and the idea that a good bride was pious, graceful, intelligent, and of good birth was broadly entrenched in the senatorial aristocracy, with its roots in Roman antiquity. Merovingian kings and their supporters, on the other hand, had several reasons to prefer lowborn brides, or to accept the exchange of one wife for another. These included savvy political reasons, which should not be overshadowed by Gregory's suggestion that lust and whimsy were to blame (even if the latter two are not wholly discounted). Neither should the extent to which the ideas of monogamy and exclusivity shaped the actions of both the kings and their partners be underappreciated. The Merovingian courts also looked to Roman antiquity, and Christian morals, for inspiration, even if only to appropriate them for political ends, though there were some kings who willingly accepted these ideals in an unadulterated form. By the mid-sixth century, there was no alternative, Germanic institutionalised practice to draw upon.

III

BRUNHILD AND FREDEGUND: A LITERARY ANALYSIS

Anyone reading Gregory's *Historiae* cannot help but be struck by the sharp contrast

between two of its most prominent characters, Queen Brunhild and Queen Fredegund,

who appear as political adversaries and moral opposites.[1] For all of their differences,

though, the two queens had very similar careers, and, perhaps for this reason, other

sources tended to see them as morally equivalent also, whether this meant that they

were both good or both bad.[2] Gregory, instead, drew upon this superficial likeness in

order to intensify the moral contrast between the two queens, since such similarities

invited a comparison that Brunhild was sure to win, since she, at least in Gregory's

telling, did almost nothing wrong, while Fredegund was guilty of a litany of crimes,

including more than one attempt to assassinate her rival queen.[3] Considering this, it is

surprising to find that Gregory only rarely praised Brunhild outright, even though he

withheld as much negative information about her as possible in order to present her

positively. Brunhild's benevolent character in the *Historiae* only took shape through

comparison with the wicked Fredegund, and, removed from this literary context,

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[1] On Brunhild, see Dumézil, *Reine*; Gerda Heydemann, 'Zur Gestaltung der Rolle Brunhildes in merowingischer Historiographie', in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Conradini et al. (Vienna: Österreiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 73-86; Georg Scheibelreiter, 'Die fränkische Königin Brunhild. Eine biographische Annäherung', in *Scripturus vitam: Lateinische Biographie von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. by Dorthea Walz (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2002), pp. 295-308; Nelson, 'Queens'; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 126-136, 170-174; Michel Rouche, 'Brunehaut: Romaine ou Wisigothe', in *Los Visigodos: Historia y Civilización* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1986), pp. 103-114; Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 146-148; Merta, 'Helena', pp. 12-15, 27-29; Dalton, *History*, I, 69-73; and Kurth, 'Reine'. On Fredegund, see Rhonda McDaniel, 'Fredegunde: Queen of Neustria (r. 567-597)', in *Great Lives from History: The Middle Ages, 477-1453*, ed. by Shelley Wolbrink (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2005), pp. 381-384; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 123-124; Merta, 'Helena', pp. 10-12, 26-27; and Dalton, *History*, I, 73-81.

[2] A possible exception is the eighth-century *Liber historiae Francorum*, which has been seen as presenting a rather nuanced interpretation of Fredegund, while accepting the negative view of Brunhild that was, by then, traditional. See Gerberding, *Rise*, pp. 146-172, especially pp. 161-162; and also Bernard Bachrach, 'Introduction', in *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. and trans. by id. (Lawrence, Kansas: Colorado Press, 1973), pp. 9-22 (at pp. 10-11).

[3] Nelson, 'Queens', p. 9, observed Gregory's general unwillingness to say anything bad about Brunhild.

Gregory's information on Brunhild might otherwise seem rather ambivalent.[4] In all likelihood, Gregory was motivated to employ such a complex strategy because he wanted to present Brunhild in the best possible light, but he knew that his audience would not accept a simple panegyric of the queen, given her mixed reputation.

Of course, Gregory may have been entirely justified in his moral evaluation of the two queens, but it is worth observing that others, including some of his contemporaries, disagreed. Pope Gregory I, who at times praised Brunhild, and who needed her political support for some of his projects, nonetheless felt compelled to criticise her for her tolerance of the trade in Christian slaves by Jewish merchants through her kingdom.[5] Venantius Fortunatus showed admiration for both Brunhild and Fredegund in his poetry, which suggests that he viewed them as moral equals, even if such flattery was inspired, in part, by his reliance on royal patronage.[6] Conversely, Fredegar presented both Brunhild and Fredegund as wicked queens, even though he used Gregory's *Historiae* as a source. Writing in the seventh century, Fredegar had also drawn upon the writings of Jonas of Bobbio, who considered Brunhild akin to the biblical villainess Jezebel. Jonas, in turn, had probably read the anonymous *Passio sancti Desiderii*, in which Brunhild was accused of murdering the saintly Desiderius.[7] This seventh-century tradition of animosity toward Brunhild probably has its origins in her lifetime, even if it gained momentum from Chlothar II's execution of her in 613, and his accusation that she had been responsible for an array of political assassinations throughout her lifetime.[8] Gregory had his own reasons for interpreting the two queens as moral opposites. Since his relationship with each

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[4] On the ambivalence present in Gregory's passages on Brunhild, treated in isolation from his information on Fredegund, see Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', pp. 76-78.

[5] Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, 9.213, 9.215 (discussed further below). Pope Gregory I needed Brunhild's political support to implement a reform of the Gallic Church and to facilitate a mission to the Anglo-Saxons; see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 126-127.

[6] On Fortunatus's dependence on royal patronage during his career, see George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 27-29.

[7] Wood, 'Forgery', pp. 373-375.

[8] For example, when Sisebut recounted his version of the martyrdom of Desiderius at Brunhild's hands in his *Vita vel passio sancti Desiderii*, he wrote for an audience in Septimania that had long been predisposed against the queen, her progeny, and her kingdom of Austrasia; see Sisebut, *Vita vel passio sancti Desiderii*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM, 3 (Hannover, 1896); with Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 173; Nelson, 'Queens', p. 27; Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', pp. 78-85; and Jacques Fontaine, 'King Sisebut's Vita Desiderii and the Political Function of Visigothic Hagiography', in *Visigothic Spain*, pp. 93-130.

woman will be explored in the following chapter of this study, it will suffice here to observe that his narrative had the effect of justifying his political connections with Brunhild, and of explaining his personal conflict with Fredegund, in a manner that made him appear to be a righteous man at odds with one of God's enemies. Gregory, therefore, needed to employ a careful argument, in order to convince his audience that, no matter what they thought about Brunhild, she was, without doubt, a more moral queen than Fredegund.

Introducing the Queens

It is no accident that Gregory introduced Brunhild and Fredegund in tandem, in two passages that detailed their marriages to Merovingian kings, each with contrasting moral overtones. First, Gregory described Brunhild's marriage to Sigibert, King of Austrasia, in extremely positive terms. Indeed, as argued in the preceding chapter of this study, this passage was intended as the fulfilment of Gregory's theme on proper marital policy, and it is tinged with a sense of hope rarely found in the *Historiae*. Similarly, this is one of the few moments when Gregory praised Brunhild outright. Perhaps he felt more comfortable lauding the queen at this moment, at the beginning of her career in Gaul, since it was before any of her political involvement and, therefore, before any controversy. Gregory described Brunhild as 'a girl with a graceful figure, beautiful to look at, virtuous and dignified in her manners, prudent in her advice, and charming in conversation.'[9] He also noted her conversion to Catholicism, and the wealth she brought into her husband's kingdom. By this point in the *Historiae*, Gregory's audience was well-acquainted with his criteria for a worthy bride, and it was obvious that Brunhild fit these in every way. This optimistic passage, however, was waiting to be ruined by the advent of Brunhild's nemesis, the wicked Fredegund.

In the subsequent passage, Gregory recounted, tragically, that King Chilperic had murdered his wife Galswinth *per amorem Fredegundis*, thus blaming the latter for the first of her many crimes. Galswinth, as Gregory pointed out, was Brunhild's sister, and, in his view, her marriage to Chilperic should have resulted in prosperity for her husband's kingdom of Neustria. After all, Galswinth possessed the same positive

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[9] Hist. 4.27, '*Erat enim puella elegans corpore, venusta aspectu, honesta moribus atque decora, prudens consilio et blanda colloquio.*'

qualities as her sister, and, in particular, Gregory called attention both to her conversion to Catholicism, and to the sizeable treasure that she had brought with her into the realm. Indeed, after mentioning her untimely death, Gregory immediately recounted a posthumous miracle that Galswinth had worked at her tomb, indicating that Chilperic was guilty of murdering not just a wife, but also a saint. Gregory did not mention Galswinth's miraculous powers anywhere else, nor did he reference her cult – not even in his hagiography, which is full of otherwise unknown saints, and so one might fairly doubt whether she was the object of much veneration in Gaul at all. Whatever the case, Gregory's description of her posthumous miracle in this context probably has as much to do with his literary objectives as with any heartfelt need to mention her sanctity. Not only did it increase Brunhild's reputation, by associating her with her saintly sister, but it made Fredegund's entrance into the narrative of the *Historiae* appear as an unnatural intrusion. For the remainder of the work, Fredegund continued to disturb what should have been political harmony in the Merovingian kingdoms; her reputation was thus pitted against Brunhild, Galswinth, and what should have been.

Gregory's use of these marriages in order to present Brunhild as the equal of Galswinth and the moral opposite of Fredegund is put into relief by a comparison with Fredegar's very different account of the same events. Although Fredegar used the *Historiae* as his main source for the marriages of Brunhild and Fredegund, he altered the structure of Gregory's narrative by adding information, and omitting information, in order to subvert his positive presentation of the Austrasian queen. Fredegar omitted Gregory's complimentary description of Brunhild as beautiful, graceful, and charming, and he also failed to mention her conversion to Catholicism, which left his audience with the impression, or at least the possibility, that she had remained Arian throughout her career in Gaul.[10] Fredegar also interrupted Gregory's coupling of the marriages of Brunhild and Galswinth by inserting a lengthy account of the appointment of Gogo to the office of *maior domus* between the two, and this digression negated Gregory's use of juxtaposition in order to associate Brunhild with her saintly sister.[11] In a similar spirit,

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[10] Fredegar 3.57.

[11] Fredegar 3.58-59. On Gogo, see Riché, *Education*, pp. 222-223, 238; Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 77-80, 82-87, 91-93; George, *Personal*, pp. 126-127; ead., *Latin Poet*, pp. 14, 136-140; and Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 137-141, 202-206, 256-260.

Fredegar declined to mention Galswinth's posthumous miracle, thus giving his audience no reason to believe that she was a saint, or that she had even been particularly pious. Lastly, Fredegar omitted the words *per amorem Fredegundis* from his account, and, as a result, his account attributed the murder of Galswinth to Chilperic alone.[12]

Fredegar added two unique and rather odd pieces of information about Brunhild. Firstly, he wrote that her name had originally been 'Bruna', and that -*hild* was a later addition.[13] His reasons for doing this will be discussed in a moment, but first it will simply be noted that there is no reason to believe the Visigothic royalty named any of their daughters Bruna, and that a name of only one element would be quite out of step with customary Germanic naming practices.[14] Secondly, Fredegar claimed that, after arriving from Spain, Brunhild convinced her new husband to execute Gogo, for no good reason.[15] Fredegar's claim is bizarre, since it is known from other sources that Gogo actually outlived Sigibert by several years.[16] However, his reasons for this, and for his first piece of information about Brunhild's name, can be explained by his next statement: 'So much evil and bloodshed in Francia was caused by Brunhild's intrigue that the prophecy of the Sibyl was fulfilled, who said, "Bruna is coming from the regions of Spain; many nations will perish before her gaze, and she will be crushed by the hooves of horses."'[17] The reference to Brunhild's original name,

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[12] Fredegar 3.60.

[13] Fredegar 3.57.

[14] There are very few examples of single-element names used in reference to royal women in Germanic kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxon abbess, Hilda, is probably known through a nickname shortened from a two-element original; see Catherine Karkov, 'Whitby, Jarrow, and the Commemoration of Death in Northumbria', in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. by Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 126-135 (p. 129). One suspects the same with the recorded name of Bertha, daughter of Charibert and wife of Æthelberht, which appears only in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 1.25, 1.26. On the Merovingian naming practices for women, see Ewig, 'Namengebung', pp. 37-39. All of Ewig's examples contain more than one element, although, these examples are not from the Visigothic royalty.

[15] Fredegar 3.59.

[16] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 13, 16, 22, 48; with Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 275-276. Franz Dölger argued that the Gogo who wrote *Epistolae Austrasiacae* 48 was a different Gogo than the leading Austrasian, but he did not question that the latter lived until 581 (as evidenced by Gregory in Hist. 6.1); see his *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, 5 vols (München: Oldenbourg, 1924-1965), I, 10, n. 76.

[17] Fredegar 3.59, '*Tanta mala et effusione sanguinum a Brunechildis consilium in Francia factae sunt, ut prophetia Saeville impleretur, dicens: "Veniens Bruna de partibus Spaniae, ante cuius conspectum*

and the mention of Gogo's murder, were both necessary in order to make sense of this prophecy, which was designed to make Brunhild appear as something of an antichrist.

These words of the Sibyl do not appear in any of the ancient collections of sibylline prophecies that survive, but one suspects that Fredegar may have been working with pre-existing material, since he had to make the effort to reconcile the name of Brunhild with the Bruna mentioned in the prophecy.[18] Whatever the case, Fredegar's decision to insert the prophecy in between the marriages of Brunhild and Galswinth belonged entirely to him, and it is indicative of the efforts he undertook to disrupt the structure that he found in Gregory's narrative in order to achieve a very different result. Fredegar disassociated the two sisters and exchanged the sense of hope present in Gregory's account for one of foreboding. Indeed, if Fredegar had simply wished to use the prophecy of the Sibyl in order to slander Brunhild, without regard for the structure of Gregory's narrative, then a more natural place to mention it would have been his account of Brunhild's execution, where the queen was accused of a number of murders and then rent asunder by horses.[19] Fredegar, therefore, understood Gregory's literary strategies, however subtle they may have been, and self-consciously subverted them. In all likelihood, Gregory's association of Brunhild with Galswinth, and his contrasting of Brunhild with Fredegund, were probably both as apparent to his sixth-century audience as they were to Fredegar.

Treatment of Bishops

Gregory used the similarities between the careers of Brunhild and Fredegund, subsequent to their marriages to Merovingian kings, as opportunities to demonstrate just how different each queen was morally. One example of this is the way in which Brunhild and Fredegund treated the bishops of Gaul. Fredegund was ruthless in her

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multae gentes peribunt. Haec vero aequitum calcibus disrumpetur.'" This reading extends the quotation a sentence further than Krusch's edition.

[18] Jane Woodruff observed the absence of the prophecy from known sibylline collections, but also the fact that Fredegar's language is reminiscent of typical sibylline form; see her, 'The Historia Epitomata (third book) of the Chronicle of Fredegar: An Annotated Translations and Historical Analysis of Interpolated Material (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1987), pp. 66-67, n. 151. On the likelihood that Fredegar used pre-existing material, see Kurth, *Histoire*, pp. 205-206, 406-407. On the other hand, Fredegar may have included the added step of associating the name of Bruna with Brunhild in his account simply to add verisimilitude.

[19] Fredegar 4.42.

dealings with the episcopate. She saw bishops only in terms of their secular powers, without regard to their spiritual duties, and she treated them accordingly. She was willing to bribe bishops, persecute bishops, and even kill bishops, regardless of the consequences that she would surely face in the afterlife. Only the most disreputable bishops were willing to work with her, for their own petty purposes. Brunhild, on the other hand, did nothing of the sort – or, at least, Gregory gave no indication of it. There are, however, reasons to believe that she too viewed the episcopate mostly in terms of its secular powers. Similarly, it is possible, from Gregory's information alone, to provide a different interpretation of Fredegund, and to identify several bishops who worked with the queen out of their own volition, and not always for ignoble reasons. Indeed, Gregory himself was vulnerable to the same sort of criticism that he placed at the feet of others, whether they deserved it or not, given his own indebtedness to Brunhild's political favouritism.

The most dramatic example of this within Gregory's works is perhaps the case of Praetextatus, Bishop of Rouen, who was put on trial by King Chilperic in 577 for his role in supporting the rebellion of the king's son, Merovech, whom he married to Brunhild, as well as his suspicious handling of the Brunhild's financial assets, which ended up in the hands of Chilperic's enemies.[20] Merovech's rebellion is discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this study, and so it will suffice here to discuss Gregory's defence of Praetextatus against his adversaries – Fredegund being chief among these – not only in his account of the bishop's trial, but also in person at the proceedings. Gregory's account is not entirely convincing in its details. For example, when Praetextatus had married Merovech to Brunhild, he had violated canonical prohibitions against marrying a man to his late uncle's wife – a point which Gregory conceded, but one which he clearly downplayed.[21] Instead, Gregory focused on the other charges brought against the bishop, such as treason, which, he assured his audience, had been supported by the testimony of false witnesses (*falsi testes*).

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[20] On Praetextatus and his trial, see Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Femmes royales et violences anti-épiscopales l'epoque a mérovingienne: Frédégonde et le meurtre de l'évêque Pretextat', in *Bischofsmord im Mittlelalter: Murder of Bishops*, ed. by Natalie Fryde and Dirk Reitz (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), pp. 37-50; Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 69; Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 188-192; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 122-123, 252-254; Lynch, *Godparents*, pp. 185-187; Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 92-93, 100-102; Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 282-284; Bund, *Thronsturz*, p. 267; and Hinschius, *System des katholischen Kirchenrechts*, IV, 852, n. 7 and 853, n. 4.
[21] Shanzer, 'History', pp. 407-408; Wood, 'Secret', p. 255.

However, Gregory came close to contradicting himself on this point in his handling of the charge of larceny. He wrote that Praetextatus had admitted to giving money to Brunhild's supporters, i.e. Chilperic's enemies, but that this treasure had actually belonged to Brunhild; Praetextatus had not stolen it from Chilperic and, by giving it to the queen's associates, he was, in a sense, simply returning it to her.[22] When Chilperic pressed Praetextatus, asking him why, if this treasure had been entrusted to his safekeeping he had unravelled the gold embroidery of some of the vestments and redistributed it in pieces, Gregory had Praetextatus reply: 'It felt like it was mine since it belonged to Merovech, my godson, whom I had baptised.'[23] Feeble as this reply may seem, in Gregory's telling it successfully refuted Chilperic's allegations: 'And so King Chilperic, seeing that he was unable to get [Praetextatus] through these false charges, left us, greatly troubled and disturbed in his conscience.'[24]

In Gregory's estimation, Praetextatus's real adversary was not King Chilperic, but Queen Fredegund, who never suffered from a troubled conscience, and who had no interest in hearing the bishop's reasoned defence. Thus, Gregory had Chilperic say: 'I must admit that I am overcome by the bishop's words, which I know are true – what can I do now, so that the queen may have what she wants done to him?'[25] Gregory also wrote that Fredegund had sent agents, secretly, to bribe him and his fellow bishops into granting a conviction, which he, but apparently not everyone else, refused.[26] Chilperic indulged his wife's demands and instructed certain bishops to persuade Praetextatus that it was in his interests to admit guilt and throw himself at the mercy of the crown.[27] Praetextatus took this advice, only to suffer from what was, in Gregory's

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[22] On Praetextatus's purchase of loyalties, see Curta, 'Merovingian', pp. 691-692. On Praetextatus's possible motivations for assisting Brunhild in this regard, see Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 186.

[23] Hist. 5.18, '*Proprium mihi esse videbatur, quod filio meo Merovecho erat, quem de lavacro regenerationis excipi.*'

[24] Hist. 5.18, '*Videns autem rex Chilpericus, quod eum his calumniis superare nequiret, adtonitus valde ac conscientia caonfesus, discessit a nobis.*' Joseph Lynch suggested that Praetextatus's status as Merovech's spiritual father might reasonably have justified his feeling of ownership over the prince's property, *Godparents*, p. 186.

[25] '*Victum me verbis episcopi fateor et vera esse quod dicit scio; quid nunc faciam, ut reginae de eo voluntas impleatur.*'

[26] On Fredegund's use of her financial resources, see Curta, 'Merovingian', pp. 685-686.

[27] On sycophantic bishops as a literary motif, see Fontaine, 'Hagiographie', p. 118. On the ritual of humble prostrating in order to mitigate punishment, see Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 103-106; and, more generally, Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favour: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval*

estimation, a dirty trick, since Chilperic broke his promise to abide by the canons and instead ordered Praetextatus to be excommunicated, imprisoned, and, following an escape attempt, to be banished to an island near Coutances, presumably Jersey.[28] In truth, Chilperic's sentence of imprisonment and exile was entirely canonical, a fact that Gregory obscured by replacing the word *furto* with *homocido* in his quotation of the canon that listed the crimes punishable by the loss of a bishopric.[29] Fredegar, at least, was not convinced by Gregory's narrative, describing these events curtly: 'Chilperic banished Bishop Praetextatus of Rouen on the grounds that he plotted against the crown according to Brunhild's counsel, which was substantiated by the facts.'[30]

According to Gregory, Fredegund's persecution of Praetextatus did not end with the bishop's exile and, indeed, her greatest crime was yet to come. After Chilperic's death in 584, King Guntram decided to restore Praetextatus to his post in Rouen, to the joy of the local populace, and against the vehement objections of Fredegund, whose enmity toward the bishop had not diminished in the intervening seventeen years.[31] Not to be deterred, Fredegund sent an assassin to stab Praetextatus on Easter morning, while he was singing the antiphons in church.[32] Following this act of sacrilege, Fredegund had the audacity to visit the mortally wounded Praetextatus on his deathbed, where she insisted upon her innocence. Gregory placed a condemnation of the wicked queen into the mouth of the dying Praetextatus, with clear biblical overtones: 'You will be accursed in this world, and God shall reap vengeance upon your head for my blood.'[33]

In Gregory's estimation, he and Praetextatus were not the only bishops who thought that Fredegund was a reprobate. The bishops Arthemius, Veranus, and

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France (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 62-70. On the purpose of prostration and other gestures in Gregory's narrative of Praetextatus's trial, see Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 116-117.

[28] For the identification of Jersey as the unnamed island, see Dalton, *History*, II, 542.

[29] Wood, 'Secret', p. 225.

[30] Fredegar 3.78, '*Chilpericus Praetextatum Rothomensem episcopum exilium trudit, repotans ei, quod consilium Brunechilde husus, contra Chilpericum tractarit, quod veritate subsistebat.*'

[31] Hist. 7.16. Fredegund was residing at either Rouen or the nearby estate of Rueil at the time (Hist. 7.19, 8.31), and one must assume that her supports were not included in the rejoicing populace.

[32] On Gregory's narrative of Praetextatus's murder, see Martínez Pizarro, *Rhetoric*, pp. 28-36.

[33] Hist. 8.31, '*Eris maledicta in saeculo, et erit Deus ultur sanguinis mei de capite tuo.*' For the biblical use of *ultor sanguinis*, see Numbers 35:27; Joshua 20:3-5.

Agricius also thought that she was a murderer, and only the most reprehensible bishops were willing to work with her politically.[34] It is, in fact, Gregory's habit of slandering his episcopal colleagues by pointing out their shameless service to the queen that provides an opportunity to reassess her relationship with the bishops of Gaul. For example, Ragnemod, Bishop of Paris, was clearly a supporter of Fredegund. He had been opposed to giving communion to Merovech during his rebellion against Fredegund and her husband.[35] Ragnemod had also baptised Fredegund's son Theuderic, and he had offered her shelter in the cathedral of Paris during the tumultuous aftermath of her husband's assassination.[36] For Gregory, these were all negative points, and he added that Ragnemod had been in favour of finding Praetextatus guilty, implying that the bishop had taken Fredegund's bribe.[37] However, Ragnemod cannot be seen simply as Fredegund's lackey, since he later supported Guntram's decision to reinstate Praetextatus to the See of Rouen, against Fredegund's wishes.[38] In other words, Ragnemod supported the queen on his own terms, and, although he occasionally thought she was wrong, he did not see her as the primary source of evil in Gaul.

Bertram of Bordeaux is a similar case.[39] Like Ragnemod, Gregory implied that Bertram had sought to find Praetextatus guilty because he had taken Fredegund's bribe. He certainly seems to have been close to the queen, given the accusation made by Leudast, the *Comes* of Tours, who said that Gregory had told people that Bertram was Fredegund's lover.[40] Whether or not Leudast's accusation was true, it drew its effectiveness from the perceived closeness between Bertram and Fredegund, as well as Gregory's obvious distaste for the queen.[41] However, like Ragnemod, Bertram was not simply Fredegund's minion, since, in the mid-580s, he shifted his loyalties and

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[34] For Arthemius, Veranus, and Agricius, see Hist. 8.31. On Gregory's attitude towards the episcopal office, and his colleagues, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 240-245.

[35] Hist. 5.14.

[36] Hist. 6.28, Hist. 7.4.

[37] Hist. 5.18. On Ragnemod, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 177-178.

[38] Hist. 5.18; 7.16.

[39] On Bertram, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 143-144. On the possibility that Bertram was actually a source of information for Gregory, see Hofmann, 'Men', p. 161, n. 504. For Bertram's royal connections, see Rouche, *L'Aquitaine*, p. 75.

[40] Hist. 5.47, 5.49.

[41] Stafford, *Queens*, p. 125, observed that the frequent accusations of adultery between queens and bishops derived from the 'continuing alliance between royal women and churchmen', rather than 'a continuing crisis of debauchery.'

supported the usurper Gundovald, who sought to establish himself in Gaul at the expense of Fredegund's kingdom of Neustria.[42] Other bishops, who depended more directly on Fredegund's patronage, supported her with undivided loyalty. Melantius, for example, acquired the See of Rouen after Praetextatus's exile, and, following the bishop's return to his see, Melantius stayed at Fredegund's villa in nearby Rueil, only to reacquire Rouen after Praetextatus's murder.[43] One can also add Amelius, Bishop of Bigorre, to the list of Fredegund's episcopal associates, since a letter allegedly written by the Visigothic king Leovigild to Fredegund requested that she compensate Amelius for his participation in their collective plot to thwart Guntram's forthcoming campaign into Septimania.[44] The uncertain authenticity of this letter does not detract from the suggestion that Amelius and Fredegund had a known professional relationship, since even a forged letter depended on the believability of such a claim in order to appear genuine.[45] Lastly, Bishop Egidius of Rheims should be considered in this context, since Gregory reported the rumour that he had been involved in the death of Merovech, 'because he had been close to Fredegund for a long time.'[46] However, Egidius's political connections, and the manner in which Gregory discussed them, are highly complex, and it will be necessary to return to the issue in the following chapter of this study.

Based on a close reading of Gregory's *Historiae* alone, it is possible to identify several bishops who either thought well of Fredegund, or who were at least willing to work with her when it was mutually beneficial. This is not even to mention the bishops

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[42] Hist. 7.31; cf. 8.2, 8.20. On Bertram's role in the Gundovald affair, see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 95-96. For Gundovald's ambitions as a threat to Neustria, see Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 88-99. The issue depends largely on who invited Gundovald to leave Constantinople and enter Gaul. Gregory wrote only that he had been invited *a quodam*, but he added that King Guntram blamed his namesake Guntram Boso, and several scholars have concurred with the king's suspicions: Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, p. 111; Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, p. 234; Goubert, L'Aventure', p. 442; and Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 95-96, 101-102.

[43] Hist. 7.19, 8.31, 8.41. According to Gregory, some of Melantius's fellow bishops murmured that he had been involved in Praetextatus's murder itself.

[44] Hist. 8.28. On Gregory's attitudes toward Septimania see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 214-215; and Hanz-Werner Goetz, 'Concepts of Realm and Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Some Preliminary Remarks', in *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by Walter Pohl et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 73-82.

[45] Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 299-300.

[46] Hist. 5.18, '...quod et iam longo tempore esset carus.' On Egidius, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 182-186. On Egidius's political manoeuvrings, see Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 267, n. 81; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 97-98; and Halsall, 'Nero', p. 345.

of Neustria who can be seen serving Chilperic loyally, and who, one might assume, had also had a positive relationship with Fredegund while she was married to the Neustrian king, and perhaps thereafter. There is no reason to be surprised, therefore, that Fredegund was able to find three bishops, at a moment's notice, who were willing to swear an oath defending her honour against the charge of adultery, when King Guntram expressed his doubts on the matter.[47] Furthermore, there is no express reason to assume, following Gregory, that the high-profile crimes with which Fredegund was accused diminished her support amongst the episcopate. After all, other Merovingian royals were accused of similar crimes, but this did not usually place an insuperable barrier between the king and his clergy. Of course, the murder of a bishop in his church on Easter morning was undoubtedly appalling, and the rumour that circulated implicating Fredegund, which she always steadfastly denied, was surely damaging to her reputation. Nevertheless, Gregory's particular view of the queen cannot be seen as representative of the episcopate on the whole, and the open conflict that he and Praetextatus had with her was probably the exception to the norm. Indeed, even those who agreed that Fredegund deserved blame for the fate of Praetextatus need not have concurred with Gregory's decision to emphasise her guilt to the exclusion of anyone else. There was plenty of blame to spread, and, indeed, Brunhild probably deserved a fair share. After all, Praetextatus's problems had begun when Brunhild arrived in his diocese as a political exile, after the unexpected death of her husband. Brunhild had solicited Praetextatus's help in facilitating her return to political prominence by asking him to dispense her treasure to her political supporters, and by having him celebrate her marriage to Merovech, who was, of course, the rebellious son of her late husband's murderer. As was demonstrated in the first chapter of this study, Gregory normally condemned widows who strove to remain politically relevant, emphasising the immoral consequences that inevitably resulted from such activity, yet he refused to do so with Brunhild.

Elsewhere, Gregory went to great efforts to make Brunhild's interference in the episcopate appear benign. For example, Innocentius, *Comes* of Javols, was able to become Bishop of Rodez at the expense of his rival, Transobad, because of Brunhild's

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[47] Hist. 8.9. These unnamed bishops naturally may have included some already identified as supporters of the queen.

assistance (*opitulante Brunichilde regina*).[48] Gregory gave his laconic reference to Brunhild's intervention a benevolent sense when he mentioned that it had ended an otherwise irresolvable and intensely deleterious dispute: 'The rampant scandals and tensions over succession in this church were such that it was almost completely stripped of its sacred liturgical instruments and its dignified possessions.'[49] Gregory gave a similar interpretation more explicitly elsewhere, when he wrote that King Sigibert had ordered Avitus's consecration to the See of Clermont, even though Avitus had been opposed by the local *comes* and his supporters.[50] Gregory clearly stated that, in intervening, Sigibert had been 'bypassing the inflexibility of the canons,' which was a rather unashamed admission of the fact that such royal interference was uncanonical – bishops were supposed to be elected locally and consecrated in their respective see.[51] Nevertheless, in Gregory's view Sigibert had acted benevolently, which was proved by Avitus's subsequent virtue as a bishop and his popularity with his congregation.[52] One suspects that Gregory himself identified with Avitus's experiences, since he had been appointed to the See of Tours uncanonically by Sigibert and Brunhild, even though, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, his selection went against the wishes of

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[48] Hist. 6.38. On this, see Nelson, 'Queens', pp. 24-25.

[49] Hist. 6.38, '*In qua ecclesia in tantum pro episcopatu intentiones scandala orta convaluerunt, ut paene sacris ministeriourm vasis et omni facultate meliori nudaretur.*'

[50] Hist. 4.35. On Avitus of Clermont, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 156; and Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 31-32, and n. 33.

[51] Hist. 4.35, '*rigorem canonium praeteriens*'. For the canonical regulations, see Orléans II, 3, 4, 7; Clermont, 2; Orléans III, 3; Orléans IV, 5; and Orléans V, 10, 11. These canons were frequently ignored; see Paul Fouracre, 'Why Were So Many Bishops Killed in Merovingian Francia?', in *Bischofsmord*, pp. 13-36 (at p. 24); Wood, 'Ecclesiastical', pp. 42-43; Reinhold Kaiser, 'Königtum und Bischofsherrschaft im frühmittelalterlichen Neustrien', in *Herrschaft*, pp. 83-108 (at pp. 86-90); Georg Scheibelreiter, '*Der Bischof in merowingischer Zeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1983), pp. 149-156; and Jean Gaudemet, *Les élections dans l'Église latine des origines au XVIe siècle* (Paris: F. Lanore, 1979), pp. 56-62.

[52] On the sanctity of Avitus in Gregory's works, see Hist. 4.35, 5.11; GM 64, 66; VJ 48. On Gregory's treatment of Avitus's conversion of the Jews of Clermont, and the extent to which he manipulated his material in order to stress Avitus's saintliness, see E. M. Rose, 'Gregory of Tours and the Conversion of the Jews of Clermont', in *GoT*, pp. 307-320; Friedrich Lotter, 'La crainte du prosélytisme et la peur du contact: les Juifs dans les actes des synodes mérovingiens', in *Clovis*, I, 849-879; Walter Goffart, 'The Conversions of Avitus of Clermont, and Similar Passages in Gregory of Tours', reprinted in *Rome's Fall* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 293-317; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 163-164; Brian Brennan, 'The Conversion of the Jews of Clermont, AD 576', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 36 (1985), 321-327; and Bernard Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 55-56.

some local officials in Tours.[53] Considering this, Gregory's reference to Brunhild's intervention in the See of Rodez, where *scandala* and *intentiones* raged, is best seen as a positive statement about the queen in the context of the *Historiae*.[54]

Brunhild herself may have had other, less virtuous motivations for supporting Innocentius. Once installed as Bishop of Rodez, he began harassing the neighbouring Bishop of Cahors about oversight of certain subsidiary churches. Brunhild thought that Cahors rightfully belonged to her, and so Innocentius's territorial claims may have been undertaken in furtherance of her wishes.[55] One naturally suspects that Brunhild and Innocentius may have also collaborated on another, more opprobrious occasion, even though Gregory shied from this interpretation. When Innocentius had still been *Comes* of Javols, he had accused Lupentius, the *abbas* of a local church, of *lèse majesté*.[56] According to Gregory, Brunhild summoned Lupentius to her presence, only to determine that he was innocent and send him on his way. Innocentius, however, had not been satisfied with the decision, and he ambushed Lupentius on the road, captured him, subjected him to torture, and, after releasing him briefly, recaptured him and put him to death.[57] Presumably, Innocentius still thought that Lupentius was guilty of *lèse majesté*, since torture could only be applied to priests as an interrogation technique when the charge was treason, or a similar capital offence.[58] In Gregory's estimation, however, Lupentius was clearly innocent, and he described the *abbas* as a 'holy martyr' (*sanctus martyr*), whose wonderworking relics were discovered through a miracle.[59] Brunhild, therefore, deserved credit for acquitting Lupentius of the charges, especially in light of Fredegund's persecution of the innocent Praetextatus on the same accusation

[53] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.3.
[54] Cf. Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 161-162.
[55] Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 210-211; Nelson, 'Queens', p. 24. Cahors had been part of the Austrasian kingdom under Theuderic I, until it was given to Charibert in 561. It was then part of the *morgengabe* that Chilperic gave to Brunhild's sister, Galswinth, upon his marriage to the Visigothic princess. Brunhild, therefore, had more than one reason to claim the city, as traditionally part of Austrasia and as her due inheritance. She eventually managed to acquire it (Hist. 9.11).
[56] On the problems with directly translating *abbas* as 'abbot', see Luce Pietri, 'Les Abbés de basilique dans la Gaule de VIe siècle', *RHÉF*, 69 (1983), 5-28.
[57] On the dangers one might encounter when travelling along the roads of the Merovingian kingdoms, see Albert Leighton, *Transport and Communication in Early Medieval Europe, AD 500-1000* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972), pp. 489-496.
[58] See *Codex Theodosianus*, 9.35.1-2, 11.39.10.
[59] Hist. 6.37.

of *lèse majesté*. Gregory also gave the impression that Brunhild had been unaware of Innocentius's crime, and so her support of the *comes* was free from guilt. In doing this, Gregory extended Brunhild a benefit of the doubt that he never gave to Fredegund.

Brunhild may have been more involved in the murder of Lupentius than Gregory suggested. In the seventh century, the Visigothic king Sisebut, the anonymous *Passio sancti Desiderii episcopi et martyris*, and Fredegar each blamed Brunhild for the murder of Desiderius, Bishop of Vienne.[60] Of course, this event occurred after Gregory's death, so its absence from the *Historiae* is inconsequential. However, the murder of Desiderius is remarkably similar to the murder of Lupentius in its details, which might be taken to indicate that Brunhild had had a role in the earlier killing.[61] Even without appealing to this later evidence, the circumstances seem suspicious enough – had there really not been any rumours circulating about Brunhild's involvement in the death of Lupentius for Gregory to report? And, more generally, was Brunhild really without her share of enemies within the episcopate, as one might otherwise believe based solely on Gregory's account? Gregory was able to allay any suspicions that his audience had by utilising what might otherwise have served as a basis for these suspicions in the first place – the similarities between Brunhild and Fredegund's careers – which, in Gregory's hands, became a framework for contrasting the moral character of the two queens. Within the *Historiae*, Brunhild had every opportunity to act like Fredegund, yet she did not. It is this insistence on her refusal to do wrong, rather than any list of virtuous deeds, that gave Brunhild her benevolent image.

Treatment of Servants

The aforementioned literary strategy, so apparent in Gregory's characterisation of the treatment of bishops by each queen, is equally discernable in other aspects of their lives, such as their treatment of those in their service. When Fredegund sent an assassin to murder Praetextatus, for example, she was not only guilty of the bishop's death, but

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60 Sisebut, *Vita vel passio sancti Desiderii*, 15-18; Fredegar, 4.32; *Passio sancti Desiderii episcopi et martyris*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 3 (Hannover, 1896), 9. See Wood, 'Forgery', pp. 373-375; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 133; and Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 323-331.
61 Nelson, 'Queens', pp. 27-28; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 128; Wood, 'Forgery', p. 375; Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', p. 81.

also of requiring someone in her service to commit an act of sacrilege. In Gregory's telling, Fredegund often sent her servants on sinful errands, especially assassinations, without regard for their fate, temporal or eternal.[62] This was in stark contrast to Brunhild, who treated her servants well, sometimes better than they deserved. To make the parallel even closer, Brunhild and her offspring were often the object of Fredegund's assassination attempts. Naturally, Fredegund's servants occasionally hesitated to undertake such missions, since they had little chance of survival, and so the queen resorted to various tactics, including the use of intoxicants, in order to bolster their resolve. Fredegund had little concern for those assassins of hers who were captured and subjected to a gruesome fate, and, even when she had the rare opportunity to secure their release, she made no effort. Within the *Historiae*, Fredegund treated her underlings as poorly as her enemies, and, once again, Brunhild's reputation gained from the comparison.

In a typical example, Fredegund instructed two men in her service, who happened to be clergymen (*clerici*), to disguise themselves as beggars in order to get close to Brunhild's son, Childebert, and stab him with poisoned daggers. When the men balked at their dangerous task, Fredegund drugged them (*medificatus potione direxit*) and then sent them on their way, equipping them with an additional supply of the potion in case they needed further encouragement just before fulfilling their mission. After some time, Fredegund sent a slave to investigate whether or not the assassins had been successful. This slave, like the two clergymen before him, was captured, and the trio were subjected to severe punishments: 'their hands, ears, and noses were severed, and then they were executed in a variety of ways,' Gregory noted.[63] This fate was only to be expected for those guilty of endeavouring to kill the king, and the blame for such cruelty rested, not with its administrator, but with Fredegund herself. A similar fate befell twelve other men, sent by Fredegund to kill Childebert and his son, Theudebert. Gregory wrote, 'Some were thrown into prison. Others were released with their hands severed. Still more had their noses and ears cut off, so that they would be subjected to mockery. Many who were bound chose to fall on their own swords, afraid to suffer such punishments; others died from these

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[62] For Fredegund's frequent use of assassins, see, for example, Hist. 4.51, 5.14, 5.18, 7.7, 7.20, 8.29, 10.18.

[63] Hist. 8.29, '...*truncatis manibus auribusque et naribus, variis sunt mortibus interempti.*'

tortures, thus satisfying the king's vengeance.'[64] Gregory's emphasis on the terrible fate of these assassins not only explained why Fredegund had to resort to intoxicants in order to ensure that her servants accepted their orders, but it also made the queen seem all the more cruel, since she treated her underlings as expendable assets. The sufferings that these assassins endured were, presumably, only a foretaste of what awaited the queen in the afterlife for orchestrating such crimes.

Gregory wrote that, on occasion, even Fredegund's diplomatic envoys suffered suspicion on account of her reputation. When Guntram found an armed man alone and passed out drunk in his oratory, he assumed that this man was an inept assassin, and, with less justification, that he had been working in conjunction with the Neustrian ambassadors who happened to be visiting his court at the same time. Gregory himself had no doubt that this tenuous connection was more than a mere coincidence: 'It is truly obvious that the envoys had been sent in order to slay the king through subterfuge, but that the mercy of God would not allow it.'[65] Perhaps more significantly, Fredegund made no effort to help the envoys avoid punishment, even though she had the opportunity to clear up the misunderstanding. Guntram sent their leader, Baddo, to Fredegund in fetters, under the agreement that he would set Baddo free if she found respected men willing to prove his innocence by compurgation. Fredegund, however, failed to send anyone noteworthy to attest to Baddo's integrity, and so he was sent back to Guntram and imprisoned in Chalon-sur-Saône, until one of Fredegund's opponents intervened and secured his release.[66] In Gregory's telling, Fredegund cared so little for her servants that she would rather let them languish in a Burgundian dungeon than call in a favour on their behalf.

Fredegund treated those in her service so poorly that the reader of the *Historiae* is hardly surprised by brief statements like the one concerning the disaffected *Dux* Beppolen, who 'went over to King Guntram because Fredegund had greatly mistreated

[64] Hist. 10.18, '...*alios carceribus mancipant, alios manibus incisis relinqunt, nonnullis nares auresque amputatis, ad ridiculum laxaverunt. Plerique tamen ex vinctis suppliciorum genera metuentes, propriis se confodere mucronibus, nonnulli etiam inter subplitia defecerunt, ut regis ultio pataretur.*'
[65] Hist. 8.44, '*Manifestissime enim patiut, sub hoc dolo a Fredegunde fuisse directus, ut regem interficere deberent, quod misericordia Domini non permisit.*'
[66] Hist. 9.13. Baddo's release was secured by Leudovald, Bishop of Bayeux, whose hostility to Fredegund was mentioned in Hist. 8.31.

him, in a manner obviously unbecoming of his class and rank.'[67] Gregory did not need to provide the specifics – his overall characterisation of Fredegund was a sufficient explanation. Even her loyal servants gained no reward for their fidelity. For example, when Fredegund's daughter was captured, along with all of the treasure she was carrying with her to Spain, the Neustrian *ex-domesticus*, Leonard, who had been part of the princess's entourage, went to see the queen in her Parisian cathedral in order to give a report on the tragedy. 'When she heard this, she flew into a rage, and ordered him to be despoiled right there in the church. After he was stripped of both his garments and the baldric that he had earned in the service of King Chilperic, Fredegund ordered him to be removed from her presence.'[68] Although Leonard had chosen to stay loyal to Fredegund at this time of crisis – unlike a number of his colleagues – he won no favours in her eyes for his integrity. Gregory then added that Fredegund had also ordered the cooks (*coci*), bakers (*pistores*), and anyone else who had been in Rigunth's entourage to be stripped, flogged, and their hands severed – a seemingly irrational and thoroughly unjust decree.[69] Gregory then mentioned other abuses, concluding: 'At this time she committed many other senseless acts, having no fear of God, in whose cathedral she was seeking refuge.'[70]

Gregory's description of the queen's actions is clearly harsh. He had no sympathy for the woman, even though her daughter's capture had occurred immediately after the assassination of her husband, Chilperic, which had put her in a very vulnerable position. Indeed, in the wake of such public disgrace, Fredegund may have needed to make a dramatic show of strength, and this might explain her treatment of Leonard and the others involved in Rigunth's ill-fated caravan.[71] But Gregory was not interested in stressing any mitigating circumstances of what was, for him, an act akin to sacrilege – and neither was it her last. Fredegund also hired a man

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[67] Hist. 8.42, '*Per quam cum Beppolenus dux valde fatigaretur, nec juxta personam suam ei honor debetus inpenderetur, cernens se dispici, ad Guntchramno regem abiit.*'

[68] Hist. 7.15, '*Haec illa audiens furore commota, iussit eum in ipsa aeclesia expoliari, nundatumque vestimentis ac balteo, quod ex munere Chilperici regis habebat, discedere a sua iubet praesentia.*' On the baldric as a symbol of social rank, see Buc, *Dangers*, p. 41 and n. 101.

[69] On the translation of '*demanicus*' as 'hands cut off', see Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an 'Exchange of Violence'', *EME*, 11 (2002), 1-18 (at p. 13, n. 37).

[70] Hist. 7.15, '*Multa quidem ibi vana exercens, non metuebat Deum, in cuius aeclesiam patebat auxilium.*'

[71] Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering', pp. 12-13.

named Claudius to eliminate her adversary, Eberulf, who was seeking sanctuary in St. Martin's church in Tours. Claudius had also been hired for the same task by King Guntram, but, while the king had enjoined Claudius not to kill Eberulf unless he was outside of St. Martin's, 'so as not to defile the holy church', Fredegund promised to reward Claudius 'even if he slaughtered him in the very atrium [of the church]'.[72] In the ensuing event, both Eberulf and Claudius were slain, and the atrium was indeed 'desecrated by bloodshed', in Gregory's words.[73] Here, as with the example of Praetextatus's murder, Fredegund showed no reluctance to violate even the most sacred of places, and she was completely comfortable enlisting others in accomplishing the task. In Gregory's view, it was not surprising that a queen who had such contempt for the fundamental principles that structured Christian society would treat those in her service so badly. Bonds of personal loyalty meant nothing to her. In this way, Gregory put Fredegund's behaviour into stark contrast with Brunhild's, since the Austrasian queen treated her servants well, never asking them to partake in anything like a sinful errand of assassination, and supporting them even when they probably deserved to be left to their fate.

Brunhild's defence of her servants within the *Historiae* is evidenced by Gregory's account of Lupus, *Dux* of Champagne, who found himself in a desperate position when his longstanding enemies, Ursio and Berthefred, marched an army against him.[74] Brunhild intervened on behalf of Lupus, whom Gregory called her *fidelis*, by standing between the hostile forces, steadfastly urging Ursio and Berthefred to desist, even when Ursio threatened to have her trampled by a charge of horses – an ironic threat, considering the manner in which she was later executed, in 613, by having her limbs tied to horses, who tore her into pieces. Gregory's account is similar to his description of how the saintly queen Chlothild had prevented a civil war between her sons by praying for the intercession of St. Martin, which resulted in a hailstorm that disturbed the camps of the opposing armies with such fury that the

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[72] Hist. 7.29, '...*ne sanctae basilicae iniuriam inferas, omnino commoneo*,' and, '...*aut certe in ipso eum atrio trucedaret.*'

[73] Hist. 7.29, '...*humano sanguine polluerunt.*' On the relationship between Eberulf and Gregory, see Bernhard Jussen, *Patenschaft und Adoption im frühen Mittelalter: Künstliche Verwantschaft als soziale Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 221-225; Peter Brown, 'Gregory of Tours: Introduction', in *GoT*, pp. 1-28 (at p. 21); Lynch, *Godparents*, pp. 196-197; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 289-291.

[74] On Lupus, see George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 132-136.

conflict was abated.[75] Likewise, Gregory's use of *viriliter*, i.e. with the courage of a man, to describe Brunhild's confrontation with Ursio is reminiscent of his description of her daughter, Ingund, who had resisted the attempts of her stepmother to convert her to Arianism forcefully by acting *viriliter*, as well as his statement the ascetic Monegund had acted *viriliter* in her undaunted pursuit of holiness.[76] Therefore, even though Brunhild was unable to spare Lupus completely from his adversaries, who confiscated his property and forced him to flee the kingdom, she managed to save his life, and her selfless bravery was clearly to her credit, associating her with the righteous deeds of other virtuous Merovingian women.[77]

Gregory's presentation of Brunhild as a peacemaker stands in contrast to other sources. For example, Germanus of Paris thought that Brunhild had been the primary instigator of the civil war between her husband and her brother-in-law, and he wrote to her urging her to follow the biblical example of Esther and to work towards peace.[78] Gregory's account of the civil war mentioned Germanus's attempt to bring peace, but he described him as admonishing Sigibert in person, rather than Brunhild in a letter.[79] There is some reason to believe that Gregory knew of the correspondence, since he had used the same biblical phrase, referencing greed as the root of all evil, that Germanus had in the preface to Book 5 of the *Historiae*, which lamented civil wars, and which followed immediately after his account of the conflict between Sigibert and Chilperic.[80] Of course, it is possible that Gregory and Germanus's use of *radix malorum* resulted simply from a common immersion in biblical thought and idiom, and that the Bishop of Paris had admonished both Brunhild and Sigibert in different ways. But it is equally possible that Gregory knew of Germanus's letter, and that he sought to use it in a manner more acceptable to his overall themes, erasing Brunhild's responsibility from the record. After all, Germanus's letter was delivered to the Austrasian court by a man

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[75] Hist. 3.28.

[76] Hist. 5.38; VP 19 preface. Gregory's use of the word *viriliter*, and its gendered implications, is discussed further in Chapter V.

[77] Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', pp. 76-77.

[78] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 9. See Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 175-176. There are good reasons to see the civil war between Sigibert and Chilperic as resulting from Austrasian aggression; see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 202-203; also Widdowson, 'Merovingian', pp. 12-15.

[79] Hist. 4.51; with Halsall, 'Preface', p. 313; and Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 194, n. 8.

[80] Hist. 5.preface, '...*et tu liber capite tuo, id est Christo, servias, qui quondam radicem malorum.*' *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 9, '*cupiditas, quae radix est omnius malorum...*'. See 1 Timothy 6:10.

named Gundulf, who may well have been Gregory's uncle of the same name, who served as a *dux* in the kingdom, and who met with Gregory in the early 580s.[81]

Later sources blamed Brunhild for another fraternal conflict, involving her two grandsons, Theuderic and Theudebert, which occurred in the early seventh century. Fredegar wrote that Brunhild had instigated the war, urging Theuderic to attack his brother because he was illegitimate.[82] The *Liber historiae Francorum* concurred, and added that Theuderic had killed one of Theudebert's sons by smashing his head on a stone, presumably on Brunhild's advice.[83] Indeed, as the conflict was brewing, Bulgar, *Comes* of Septimania, wrote a letter to a Gallic bishop in which he described Brunhild as the 'monger of strife' (*iurgiorum auctrix*).[84] All of this stands in contrast to Gregory's image of a valiant Brunhild risking her own life in order to save her loyal servant, Lupus, from Ursio and Berthefred, who were two notorious figures in the *Historiae*. Indeed, in Gregory's view, Lupus did not even necessarily deserve her support. Though not exactly bad, Lupus was no hero of the *Historiae*, since he had a reputation for breaking his word, and since he had the dubious distinction of having supported Andarchius, a former slave and thief who, once freed, abused his own slaves so horribly that they eventually took revenge by burning him alive.[85] Indeed, Brunhild's respect for the bonds of personal loyalty was so genuine, in Gregory's estimation, that, when Ursio and Berthefred later sought and failed to remove her family from power

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[81] Hist. 6.11, 6.26. See Halsall, 'Preface', p. 314.

[82] Fredegar 4.27.

[83] LHF 38.

[84] *Epistolae Wisigoticae*, 11.

[85] Hist. 4.46 (Andarchius), 9.14 (oathbreaker), cf. 6.4. According to Gregory, the savvy Andarchius had been educated in Roman law, either the Theodosian Code or perhaps the Breviary of Alaric; see Wood, 'The Code in Merovingian Gaul', p. 167. Gregory could have made a hero out of Lupus if he had wished. Fortunatus had no trouble doing so, when he described the *Dux* of Champagne as a military genius, akin to the legendary Roman generals Scipio Africanus, Cato Censorius, and Pompey Magnus. See Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 7.7; with George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 79-82, 132-136. Fortunatus addressed three poems to Lupus, and one to Lupus's brother (*Carmina*, 7.7-10), in which he presented the *dux* as a capable administrator and honourable judge, according to the highest standards of Roman antiquity. On the value of *romanitas* in Merovingian Gaul, see Guy Halsall, 'Social Identities and Social Relationships in Early Merovingian Gaul', in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, 3, ed. by Ian Wood (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 141-176.

and seize Austrasia for themselves, Brunhild mercifully offered to spare Berthefred's life, because she was the godmother of his daughter.[86]

While Fredegund had treated those in her service miserably, including those who had been faithful to her, Brunhild defended those in her service even if they were undeserving of her loyalty. Even the notorious Sichar, whom Gregory described as 'a careless individual, a drunkard, and a murderer,' found support, posthumously, from the queen, after his rival Chramnesind killed him in an act of vengeance.[87] Gregory wrote that Brunhild 'took very seriously that Sichar, who had been placed in her service, had been slain,' and that she confiscated Chramnesind's property, because 'she had placed Sichar under a vow of protection.'[88] In this way, Gregory was able to use what might otherwise have been seen as a criticism of the queen – that she supported certain disreputable individuals – as a way of highlighting her positive qualities, including her respect for the bonds of personal loyalty that were so important in sixth-century Gallic society. Gregory, after all, is unlikely to have seen mere association with Sichar as a mark against one's character, since he himself had dealt with the man personally, when he had acted as an arbitrator in a dispute between Sichar and a man named Austregisel, after they had killed each other's servants and confiscated each other's property.[89]

Gregory never described Brunhild as sending any of her servants on assassination missions, or any other immoral errands. On one occasion, Gregory did write that King Guntram suspected that Brunhild wanted him dead, but this lone reference, given as reported speech and lacking any specifics, was probably intended to emphasise the king's paranoia, which is hinted elsewhere in the *Historiae*, especially since Brunhild was the least likely royal to undertake such a crime.[90] This stands in contrast with later sources, which showed no hesitation in accusing Brunhild of

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[86] Hist. 9.9, 9.11. On the bond created between Brunhild and Berthefred because of her role as godmother of his daughter, see Lynch, *Godparents*, p. 196.

[87] Hist. 7.47, 9.19 (*levis, ebriosus, homicida*). On the episode between Sichar and Chramnesind, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der Abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Fruncke, 1946), pp. 81-97; N. D. Fustel de Coulanges, 'De l'analyze des textes historique', *Revue des questions historiques*, 41 (1887), 5-35; and Gabriel Monod, 'Adventures de Sichaire', *Revue historique*, 31 (1886), 259-290.

[88] Hist. 9.19, '...*graviter accepiset, eo quod in eius verbo Sicharius positus taliter fuerat interfectus*,' and, '...*in verbo suo posuerat Sicharium*.'

[89] Hist. 7.47.

[90] Hist. 8.4. On Guntram's paranoia in the *Historiae*, see Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 178, 208, 225-227.

numerous assassinations. Fredegar, for example, wrote that she had been involved in the murders of King Chilperic, *Dux* Wintrio, the *Patricii* Aegyla and Wulfus, and, of course, Bishop Desiderius.[91] He also recorded Chlothar II's charge that she had slain ten kings, which essentially blamed her for every royal murder of her generation.[92] Similarly, the *Liber historiae Francorum* mentioned that she had poisoned her grandson Theuderic, and that she had then killed his three young sons.[93] Of course, most of these murders occurred after Gregory's death, but one must naturally question whether or not his failure to accuse the queen of murder was due simply to a lack of material. After all, he recorded Fredegund's crimes even when she was only implicated through vague rumours, and he went to the added effort to detail how she had involved others, including her servants, in her sinful undertakings. In doing so, Gregory reminded his audience that, if one had to be in the service of a Merovingian queen, it was far preferable to have Brunhild as a patron than Fredegund.

Treatment of Offspring

Gregory did not lose sight of the fact that these two queens were also mothers, and he contrasted the manner in which each one treated her own offspring. Unsurprisingly, Gregory presented Fredegund in the worst possible light. She was willing to let one of her sons die unbaptised simply because she feared that her own death was imminent. And she also tried to kill her daughter, Rigunth, with her bare hands. Even when Fredegund apparently showed concern for her children, Gregory made it seem as if she had done so only because her own life was negatively impacted by their ordeals. In other words, Fredegund only cared for her children to the extent that it suited her self-interested aims.[94] Brunhild, on the other hand, never treated her children poorly, and, when her daughter Ingund became a prisoner of Byzantine forces after her husband Hermenegild launched a rebellion in Spain, she attempted to use her political influence to see the girl released, albeit unsuccessfully. Gregory, however, did not place as much emphasis on Brunhild's relationship with her children as he did with Fredegund, and

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[91] Fredegar 3.93, 4.18, 4.21, 4.29, 4.32
[92] Fredegar 4.42.
[93] LHF 39. On the presentation of Brunhild in the *Liber historiae Francorum*, see Gerberding, *Rise*, pp. 136-137.
[94] On this point, see the analysis of Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 123-124.

he did not praise Brunhild outright in this regard. One might guess that his audience was uncomfortable with the fact that Brunhild had sent her daughter to the Arian rulers of Spain in the first place, especially since Hermenegild's rebellion had ended badly for everyone involved. Later sources, as mentioned previously, recounted how Brunhild had pitted one of her grandsons against another, and, although contemporary evidence suggests that she cared deeply for her daughter (and her daughter's young son Athanagild), Gregory probably thought it was more prudent to keep to his overall literary strategy, presenting Brunhild positively by comparing her with the exceedingly wicked Fredegund.

Even when Fredegund acted generously toward her children, Gregory managed to cast her conduct in a negative light. For example, when Fredegund had sent her daughter, Rigunth, to marry a Visigothic prince in Spain, she had loaded the girl's wedding caravan with a *magnus thesaurus*, the size of which alarmed even her husband, Chilperic.[95] Gregory thought that this wealth was a liability, and, as soon as the caravan departed, some disloyal members of Rigunth's entourage made off with a good portion of the treasure. Even the more loyal individuals accompanying the princess were not happy with their task: many of the nobles drafted their wills, assuming that they would never return, and some of the Parisian servants assigned to the caravan chose to hang themselves, rather than undertake the journey. Indeed, Gregory wrote that there was such lamentation in Paris that it was comparable with the biblical account of Egypt's mourning during the plagues of Moses.[96] The jeremiad proved to be prophetic, since Rigunth and all of her goods were captured in Toulouse, with the treasure eventually ending up in the hands of Gundovald, a usurper whom Gregory dubbed *ballomer* in the *Historiae*, which apparently meant something like

[95] Hist. 6.45. On the giving of gifts upon royal betrothal, and Rigunth's place therein, see Pauline Stafford, 'Queens and Treasure in the Early Middle Ages', in Treasure in the Medieval West, ed. by Elizabeth M. Tyler (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), pp. 61-82 (at pp. 69); ead., Queens, pp. 57-58; Réal, 'Entre', pp. 397-401; and Dominic James, 'Treasure Bequest: Death and Gift in the Early Middle Ages', in The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe, ed. by Joyce Hill and Mary Swan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 363-377 (p. 375).
[96] On the omens that occurred at the departure of Rigunth's wedding caravan, see de Nie, Views, pp. 43-45.

'renowned for his wickedness' (ein für seine Bosheit Bekannter), according to Ulrich Nonn.[97]

Although Fredegund dispatched Chuppa, the Neustrian *comes stabuli*, to Toulouse in order to retrieve her daughter, Gregory suggested that the queen's true motives lay elsewhere: 'Most people thought that [Chuppa] had been sent in order to entice Gundovald, if he was still alive, and, through various promises, to bring him to her. Since he was unable to do so, he took Rigunth from the place and brought her back, disgraced and humiliated as she was.'[98] In Gregory's telling, Chuppa's acquisition of Rigunth was almost an afterthought. Furthermore, a reader of the *Historiae* might not think that Chuppa had been the wisest choice to send in order to rescue one's daughter, since he had attempted to seize (*deripere*, rape?) a bishop's daughter and force her to marry him, in addition to the other acts of brigandage that he was known to undertake.[99] Indeed, Gregory made it difficult to believe that Fredegund had ever cared for her daughter, considering his account of the queen's relationship with the princess upon the latter's return from Toulouse. Gregory wrote that Fredegund and Rigunth regularly fought with each other (*rixae et caedes*), mostly over Rigunth's loose sexual mores, which was an ironic statement considering the doubts that existed about Fredegund's own sexual fidelity, discussed further in Chapter IV of this study. Gregory even wrote that Fredegund had invited Rigunth into her chambers, and asked her to reach into a chest full of valuable jewellery and take what she liked, in what seemed to be a gesture of reconciliation, only to then slam the lid onto the neck of the unsuspecting girl, choking her with such force that her larynx began to collapse and her eyes began to pop out. The princess was saved when a slave girl noticed that

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[97] Hist. 7.9-10. See Nonn, 'Ballomeris', pp. 38-39. The term *ballomer* was rendered as 'falsches Vieh' by Kursch, 'Gregorii episcopi', p. 313, n. 1. This translation allows for a possible parallel with an insult made against Chlothar II in LHF 41, where the king is called a 'false mule' (*balle iumentum*). On this point, see Reinhard Wenskus, 'Bemerkungen zum thunginus der Lex Salica', in *Festschrift Percy Ernst Schramm zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag von Schülern und Freunden zugeeignet*, ed. by Peter Classen and Peter Scheibert, 2 vols (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1964), I, 217-237 (at 235, n. 14).

[98] Hist. 7.39, '*Ferebant enim plerique ob hac eum transmissum, ut, si Gundovald repperisset vivum, multis inlectum promissionibus ad eam transduceret. Sed cum hoc facere nequivissit, acceptam Rigundem a loco illo reduxit, non sine grande humilitate adque contumelia.*'

[99] Hist. 10.5.

the princess was in distress and alerted men standing outside the doors of the royal chambers, who rescued her from imminent death.[100]

Rigunth was not the only child to suffer at Fredegund's hands. When the queen and her husband, Chilperic, were besieged at Tournai in 575 during their war with Sigibert, it seemed as if they were on the verge of defeat and certain death. In this moment of despair, Fredegund treated her newborn son Samson with callous disregard: '[Samson's] mother, fearing that she would soon die, cast the boy aside, wishing him to perish.'[101] The tragedy was only averted, Gregory wrote, when Chilperic intervened, saving the boy's life, and only afterwards did Fredegund decide to have him baptised. Her seemingly irrational desire to see her son join her in death is reminiscent of Gregory's statement that Queen Austrechild had begged her husband, Guntram, to execute her physicians upon her death, so that her family would not be alone in its mourning, discussed earlier in this study.[102] Fredegund's disregard for Samson's life, however, was even worse, not only because it concerned her own newborn son, but also because she was willing to see the boy condemned to the fate of the unbaptised. Although Gregory never explicitly stated his opinions on what sort of afterlife awaited unbaptised children, he clearly thought that the prospects were not good, given his statement in his *Liber vitae patrum*, where he described a woman whose son fell ill: 'The boy's mother wept, not so much because he was to die, but because he had not yet been regenerated by the sacrament of baptism.'[103] Fredegund shed no tears for Samson.

On one occasion, Gregory described Fredegund as showing concern for one of her children, who was ill from the plague.[104] Even this passage, however, seems to be intended as a criticism of the queen. When a plague broke out in Gaul during the August of 580, Chilperic fell ill. No sooner had he recovered than his son Dagobert also caught the disease, and, lastly, Dagobert's elder brother Chlodobert became sick. It was at this point, at the thought of losing her eldest son, that Fredegund became repentant

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[100] Hist. 9.34 (which also mentions the *rixae et caedes*).

[101] Hist. 5.22, '*Quem mater ob metum moris a se abicit et perdere voluit.*' cf. 4.50-51.

[102] Hist. 5.35.

[103] VP 2.4, '*Flebat autem illa genitrix non minus obitum parvuli, quam illud quod non fuerat adhuc denuo delibutus baptismatis sacramentis.*'

[104] Hist. 5.34.

– 'too late' (*sero*), Gregory added.[105] Gregory then put a speech into Fredegund's mouth, where she stated that divine judgement had finally befallen her and her husband for their greed, at the expense of the poor, the orphans, and widows. Gregory then wrote that Fredegund burned the 'unjust tax lists' (*discriptiones iniquae*) for her cities, and urged her husband to do the same for his.[106] This act of repentance, however, was to no avail, since both Dagobert and Chlodobert died from the plague. After the two princes had been buried, Chilperic, but not Fredegund, donated a large sum to the poor, to churches, and to cathedrals. The queen, instead, continued to act as sinfully as ever. A mere five chapters later in the *Historiae*, Gregory described her orchestration of the murder of her stepson, Chlodovech, and the purging of his side of the royal family.[107]

Because Gregory described Fredegund as repenting of her crimes, and burning tax lists that he considered *iniquus*, this passage has been seen by some scholars as a rare moment when the queen appeared positively in the *Historiae*.[108] Although Gregory certainly thought that penitence was a virtue, the details of this passage seem at odds with this interpretation. Fredegund, who just a few chapters previously had wished to see Samson die unbaptised, did nothing when first her husband Chilperic, then her son Dagobert became ill. Moreover, her belated and presumably disingenuous repentance had found no reception in Heaven, since God had not chosen to spare Chlodobert or his brother from death. Gregory's audience had no reason to feel sympathy toward the queen whom God had denied. Furthermore, the penitential speech that Gregory put in Fredegund's mouth is an almost verbatim reproduction of the prologue to Book 5, where Gregory lamented the consequences of kings engaging civil wars, as Chilperic had done.[109] Thus, Gregory's aim was not to use this speech in order to present Fredegund in a positive light, but to confirm his own condemnation of the queen and

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[105] Hist. 5.34.

[106] On Gregory's attitude toward taxation, see Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 102-115; and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', pp. 66-69. On Merovingian taxation, see Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 102-115; Jean Durliat, *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens (284-888)* (Simmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), pp. 95-187, 310-314; Reinhold Kaiser, 'Steuer und Zoll in der Merowingerzeit', *Francia*, 7 (1979), 1-17; and Ferdinand Lot, *L'impôt foncier et la capitation personnelle sous le Bas-Empire et à l'époque franque* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études, 1928), pp. 83-107.

[107] Hist. 5.39.

[108] See, for example, Halsall, 'Nero' p. 342; McNamara, 'Imitatio', p. 65; Myers, *Medieval*, pp. 86-88.

[109] Halsall, 'Preface', pp. 303-304.

her husband by having Fredegund confess to their crimes. Even her burning of the tax lists seems to have been inconsequential, since, a few years later, Fredegund was able to load her daughter Rigunth's aforementioned caravan with a *magnus thesaurus* that she had been collected 'from the proceeds of my numerous tax revenues' (*de fructibus tributis plurima*), in addition to other sources of income.[110]

The negative tone of this passage was not lost on the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum*, who sympathised with the heroes of the Neustrian past, and who generally presented Fredegund in a better light than Gregory had done.[111] Using the *Historiae* as a source, the author of the *LHF* sought to reshape this passage into a truly positive one, removing Gregory's crucial word, *sero*, in order to make Fredegund's repentance seem timely, and adding that she was filled with sorrow at the suffering of both of her sons.[112] While such a statement would have seemed out of place in the *Historiae*, given Fredegund's treatment of Samson, the *LHF* omitted Gregory's account of the events in Tournai in 575 regarding the unbaptised child.[113] Moreover, the author of the *LHF* avoided the sense of futility in Fredegund's repentance, implied by the death of both of children, by crediting the queen with a higher goal: 'If we lose our sons, at least we might avoid eternal punishment.'[114] Thus, in the hands of the *LHF*-author, Fredegund's decision to repent and burn the unjust tax lists had the potential to win her salvation. This interpretation is completely absent from Gregory's *Historiae*, especially since, throughout the remainder of the work, Fredegund continued to commit egregiously sinful acts, without the slightest remorse.[115]

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[110] Hist. 6.45.

[111] On the author's admiration for the Neustrian past, see Paul Fouracre, 'Attitudes Toward Violence in Seventh- and Eighth- Century Francia', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 60-75 (p. 64); Gerberding, *Rise*, p. 32, 146-159; and Bruno Krusch, 'Liber historiae Francorum', in *MGH SRM*, 2 (Hannover, 1888), pp. 215-229 (at p. 215). Gerberding noted that the author of the *LHF* presented Fredegund in a better light than his predecessor, Gregory of Tours, 'even though he does not disdain to tell her misdeeds', pp. 156-157.

[112] LHF 34.

[113] The LHF mentioned only Samson's uneventful death, still as a child, in the late 570s (LHF 33).

[114] LHF 34, '*Si natos perdimus, vel poenam perpetuam evadamus.*'

[115] This includes her efforts to accomplish the downfall of Chilperic's sons from another woman. According to Gregory, Fredegund secretly killed Chlodovech, she was rumoured to have killed Merovech, and she rejoiced at the untimely death of Theudebert; see Hist. 5.39 (Chlodovech), 5.18 (Merovech), 5.19 (Theudebert).

The eighth-century author of the *LHF* was not the only person to see Fredegund's relationship with her children in a different light. Gregory's contemporary, Venantius Fortunatus, wrote two poems of consolation to the queen and her husband, one immediately after the deaths of Chlodobert and Dagobert, and another about six months later.[116] He explained that humans suffered from disease as a consequence of original sin, and so the deaths of the two boys from the plague were not necessarily the result of any personal sinfulness on the part of the king or queen. In particular, Fortunatus showed concern for Fredegund's outpouring of maternal grief, instructing her husband to calm her, not allowing himself or her to cry excessively.[117] Surprisingly, Fortunatus even referenced the biblical figure Samson, among a list of other biblical heroes, without any apparent worry that he might call to mind the events surrounding Fredegund's other son of the same name.[118] Not only does this represent a completely different interpretation of Fredegund's relationship with her offspring than the one provided by Gregory, but it also raises doubt about whether or not Fredegund really wished to consign Samson to the fate of the unbaptised dead. Further doubt is raised by Fredegar, who wrote that Fredegund's son Chlothar was learned in literature (*litterum eruditus*) and god-fearing (*timens Deum*) – two qualities that one might credit to his mother's influence, especially in light of Fredegar's criticism that Chlothar was far too willing to take advice from women.[119] Furthermore, the *Liber historiae Francorum* even recounted how Fredegund had brought Chlothar with her on a victorious military campaign.[120] One might guess that Fredegund had shown the same interest in the spiritual, intellectual, and martial education of her other sons, Samson included.[121]

Of course, this is not to suggest that Gregory's information on Fredegund was the result of pure fabrication, but it does reveal the lengths he went to in order to emphasise the queen's contemptible treatment of her offspring, and to omit information to the contrary. This stands in contrast to his presentation of Brunhild,

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[116] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 9.2, 9.3. On the dates, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, p. 80, n. 37, and p. 87, n. 90.

[117] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 9.2, lines 90-93.

[118] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 9.2, line 29.

[119] Fredegar, 4.42.

[120] LHF 36, 41. On the campaign of chapter 36, see Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 34-35; and Bachrach, *Merovingian*, pp. 74-75.

[121] On the role of queen in the education and formation of their children, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 112-114.

who never did anything to harm her children, and who, on occasion, went to great efforts to protect them. For example, Gregory wrote how Brunhild had intervened to retrieve her daughter from Byzantine forces, when she was detained in North Africa, *en route* to Constantinople, following the failed rebellion of her Visigothic husband Hermenegild.[122] When her son, King Childebert, met with his *priores* at a villa in the Ardennes in 585 in order to decide the fate of an Austrasian *dux* who had been accused of grave robbery, Brunhild took the opportunity and 'issued a complaint to all the noblemen, on behalf of her daughter Ingund, who was still detained in Africa, although she received little consolation.'[123] Presumably, Brunhild wanted the nobles to come to some arrangement with Byzantium, perhaps offering to campaign against the Lombards in exchange for Ingund's safe return.[124] Unlike Fredegund, who only rescued her daughter Rigunth as an afterthought, Brunhild used all of her political leverage, albeit unsuccessfully, on her daughter's behalf.

Significantly, Gregory only mentioned Brunhild's involvement with her daughter Ingund at this moment, following her marriage to Hermenegild and the prince's failed revolt against his father. One must naturally assume that Brunhild had played some sort of role in arranging the marriage in the first place, especially since Hermenegild was the stepson of Brunhild's mother, Goiswinth.[125] Gregory, however, declined to associate Brunhild with the marriage of her daughter to the Visigothic prince, perhaps because he wished to recount how the Arian queen Goiswinth (who was Brunhild's mother) had abused Ingund on account of her Catholicism, and because he wished to emphasise that Hermenegild had been wrong to rebel against his father. [126] Later in the *Historiae*, Gregory mentioned Brunhild's involvement in arranging the marriage of another daughter of hers, Chlodosinda, to Hermenegild's surviving brother, Reccared, who went on to convert the Visigothic kingdom to

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[122] Hist. 8.28.

[123] Hist. 8.21, '... *pro Ingunde filia, quae adhuc in Africa tenebatur, omnibus prioribus questa est, sed parum consolacionis emeruit.*'

[124] The Franks had recently launched an unsuccessful campaign against the Lombards, Hist. 8.18, cf. 6.42. On Frankish power in northern Italy, see Ian Wood, 'The Frontiers of Western Europe: Developments East of the Rhine', in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, ed. by Richard Hodges and William Bowden (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 231-253 (at pp. 239-243). On Gregory's attitude towards Frankish claims of dominion over northern Italy, see Pohl, 'Gregory', pp. 137-139.

[125] Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, pp. 45-46; Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', p. 12.

[126] See Chapter I.

Catholicism, without resorting to patricidal rebellion.[127] Of course, Gregory may have had other reasons for introducing Brunhild's relationship with Ingund only after the girl had fallen into Byzantine hands, but among these should be included his desire to omit disparaging information about the queen, such as that she had sent her daughter to the very place where she would suffer the most.

In constructing his positive account of Brunhild, Gregory was not inventing the fact that the queen was concerned for her offspring. Several letters written by Brunhild demonstrate her attempts to secure the release of her daughter and grandson from Byzantine custody.[128] For example, in 585 she wrote to Constantina, the wife of the Emperor Maurice, asking for her, as a mother, to show sympathy and return Ingund and the little Athanagild to Gaul.[129] Brunhild also wrote to Maurice directly, in an attempt to forge a bond of peace (*consilium pacis*) with Byzantium.[130] It is unclear whether or not Gregory knew of these letters, although he was aware of the general diplomatic correspondence between the Austrasians and the Byzantines taking place at the time. [131] Gregory's friend and colleague, Venantius Fortunatus, also praised Brunhild for raising exemplary children, specifically her son Chlidebert and her daughter Chlodosinda, in a poem written, perhaps, around 587.[132] Even Pope Gregory I, writing in 595, complimented Brunhild for the personal interest she had taken in Childebert's education and religious formation.[133] Lastly, a sixth-century ivory known as the Barberini diptych also witnessed Brunhild's importance within a familial

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[127] Hist. 10.16.

[128] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 26, 27, 30, 44. On Brunhild as an author, see Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 26-27.

[129] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 44. See also *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 30, which was also written by Brunhild, probably to Maurice's wife in 586.

[130] *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 26.

[131] For example, *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 29, written by Brunhild to Maurice's stepmother Anastasia, evidences the greater diplomatic exchange between Austrasian and Byzantine envoys, but with no specifics. Gregory's knowledge of the diplomatic traffic in general is evidenced by Hist. 10.2, '*Grippo autem ab imperatore Mauricio rediens, haec nuntiavit, quod anno superiore, cum, adepto navigio, cum sociis suis Africae portum adtigisset, Cartaginem magnam ingressi sunt.*'

[132] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix 6. On the date, see George, *Personal*, p. 91, n. 1. Similar allusions are found in poem 10.8.

[133] Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, 6.5. See Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 134; and Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 297-298.

context.[134] The work, which had originally been commissioned by the Byzantine emperor for secular purposes, seems to have been reemployed as a religious object and inscribed with a list of names that, apparently, all refer to members of Brunhild's family.[135] In contrast to this evidence, however, Gregory of Tours complimented the queen's treatment of her offspring more subtly, without resorting to overt statements of praise. In narrating her relationship with her children, as with the other aspects of her life, Gregory omitted certain unflattering details, and he emphasised her benevolence by placing her in a comparison with Fredegund, whose wicked deeds he narrated in detail. Gregory presented Fredegund as having no concern even for her own children, except when it suited her, and he left his reader wondering if she held anything to be sacrosanct other than her own ambition.

Sorcery, Sacrilege, and the Plot of Septimima

One of Gregory's most serious criticisms of Fredegund was his association of the queen with sorcery. Witchcraft was a capital offence in the legal texts circulating in Gaul in the sixth-century, and, although Gregory never went as far as to personally accuse the queen of being a sorceress, he gave the impression that she had an incriminatingly close relationship with the black arts. Not only did Fredegund use poison, and other concoctions on more than one occasion, but she also gave refuge to a possessed soothsayer. Tellingly, Fredegund was in perpetual fear that someone would use magic against her household, and she had more than one person executed on the charge of witchcraft. Gregory never confirmed Fredegund's suspicions, but he did say that magic had been used in an attempt to harm Brunhild, and to remove her family from power in Austrasia. It is characteristic of his presentation of the two queens that Brunhild circumvented the efforts of her opponents to use sorcery against her, while Fredegund, constantly in fear of the black arts, nonetheless dabbled in them herself. By employing this characterisation, Gregory tarnished Fredegund's reputation for donating to the Church, and promoting the veneration of certain saints in Gaul. Unlike the truly pious,

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[134] On the Barberini diptych, see Eckhardt, *Studia*, pp. 262-279.

[135] Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 181; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 135; and J. Vezin, 'Une nouvelle lecture de la liste des noms copiée au dos de l'ivoire Barberini', *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*, 7 (1971), 19-53. I have been informed by Dr. Gerberding that he no longer holds to the alternative interpretation he suggested in his, *Rise*, pp. 55-56.

who realised that all spiritual power ultimately rested with God, Fredegund saw the realm of the unseen, divine and diabolical alike, simply as a source of spiritual power to be tapped for her own worldly objectives.

Fredegund's use of some sort of potion (*medificatus potio*) to convince two of her clerics to undertake a risky assassination mission has already been observed, and it suggests that this use of herbs or chemicals may have been seen as akin to witchcraft.[136] Fredegund also equipped these assassins with poisoned daggers (*cultri veneno infici*), as she had done on other occasions, and her use of poison, *venenum*, also associated her with the black arts – *veneficium*.[137] Elsewhere in the *Historiae*, Gregory used reported speech to characterise Fredegund's use of *venenum* to kill a nobleman from Rouen as an act involving *maleficia*.[138] Although *maleficia* may simply mean 'wicked practices', it also has a sense of 'witchcraft', and Gregory used it specifically according to this latter meaning on a number of occasions in the *Historiae*.[139] Thus, when Fredegund dispatched two assassins, who killed King Sigibert while he was being elevated upon a shield in triumph at Vitry-en-Artois, Gregory wrote that the two henchmen had been bewitched by the queen: *malificati a Fredegunde regina*.[140] Similarly, when King Childebert's envoys arrived at Guntram's court, accusing Fredegund of a number of crimes, Gregory had them open with the statement: 'Your nephew asks that you command Fredegund, the *malefica*, through whom many kings have been slain, to be handed over.'[141] Although *maleficus* may mean simply an evil doer, Gregory normally used the word *malefactor* in reference to criminals, and *maleficus* in reference to sorcerers, and so his use of the term in this instance gives the impression that he had labelled Fredegund a witch, through reported speech.[142]

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[136] Hist. 8.29.

[137] For another example of Fredegund dispatching assassins with poisoned knives, see Hist. 4.51.

[138] Hist. 8.31.

[139] See Gregory's use of *maleficium* in Hist. 3.29, 5.5, 5.39, 6.35, 8.31, 9.37, 9.38, 10.8; and VP 19.3.

[140] Hist. 4.51. On the ritual of elevating kings on a shield, see Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, p. 169; Schneider, *Königswahl*, pp. 94, 105; and Reydellet, *Royauté*, pp. 384-386. Gregory gave no information regarding the fate of these assassins, but Fredegar (3.71) and the *Liber historiae Francorum* (32) stated that they were killed.

[141] Hist. 7.41, '*Rogat nepus tuus, ut Fredegundem maleficam, per quam multi reges interfecti sunt, reddi iubeas...*'

[142] Compare *malefactor* in Hist. 6.6 and 6.17 with *maleficus* in Hist. 7.14, 10.15, 10.16.

On another occasion, Gregory insinuated that Fredegund was something of a patron of the dark arts, when she gave refuge to a possessed soothsayer. A woman, who 'had a spirit of divination' (*spiritum phitonis habens*), used her powers of augury to gain both wealth and fame, so much so that she was even regarded by some as 'something divine' (*aliquid divinum*). Unimpressed, Bishop Ageric of Verdun performed an exorcism on the woman, which, although unsuccessful, proved that she was indeed possessed by a demon. Gregory then concluded his account with a curious statement: 'The girl realised that she could not live there anymore, and so she went to Queen Fredegund, where she lurked in secret.'[143] Gregory therefore left his audience to wonder what role this energumen played in Fredegund's court, or why she had felt so confident that the Neustrian queen would provide her with protection.[144] Fredegund, in Gregory's view, clearly thought that magic was an effective tool, and, indeed, she feared that others would use it against her. When two of her two sons died from the plague, Fredegund suspected that her stepson had employed a witch to bring about their deaths.[145] Similarly, when her son Theuderic also died from a disease, she blamed the *praefectus* Eunius Mummolus, whom she suspected of having used *incantationes* and *maleficii*, and the help of some Parisian *maleficae*.[146] Since Gregory never confirmed Fredegund's suspicions, each passage gives the impression that the queen was paranoid, rather than that she had been genuinely endangered by spellcraft.[147]

This association with witchcraft certainly tarnished whatever reputation Fredegund may have won for herself in Gaul as a religious benefactress, which Gregory referenced on one occasion. When her son Chlothar became ill, Fredegund promised to donate a large sum of money to St. Martin's church in Tours. Gregory never said whether or not the queen fulfilled this vow, but the thought was apparently

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[143] Hist. 7.44, '*Cernens vero puella, quod in loco illo habitare non possit, ad Fredegundem reginam abiit ibique latuit.*'

[144] On divination and magic in royal courts, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 85-90, 96-100; and Flint, *Rise*, pp. 88-92, 101-108, 146-157.

[145] Hist. 5.39.

[146] Hist. 6.35. On Gregory's portrayal of Mummolus, see Goffart, 'Conspicuously', p. 373; id., *Narrators*, p. 161; and Bernard Bachrach, 'Gregory of Tours as a Military Historian', in *GoT*, pp. 351-363 (at pp. 357-359).

[147] On Fredegund's state of *furor* at the Parisian women, and its negative connotations in the *Historiae*, see Rosenwein, 'Writings', pp. 26-27.

enough, 'for the boy seemed to get better.'[148] Also in an effort to cure the boy, Fredegund ordered Waroch, a Breton leader, to release the prisoners he had taken upon his victory over King Guntram's army in Brittany. Fredegund's mercy toward the imprisoned, however, acquired a sinister tone, when Gregory added: 'Waroch fulfilled her request, thereby confirming that Fredegund had been an accomplice in the murder of Beppolen and the destruction of his army.'[149] This referenced an earlier passage in the *Historiae*, where Fredegund had secretly reinforced Waroch's army before its clash with a Merovingian force led by Beppolen, because she wanted Beppolen killed at any price. Her treachery resulted not only in his death, but in the slaughter of his troops, which Gregory presented in tragic yet heroic terms: 'On the third day, with all his men slain, the wounded Beppolen continued to resist, his spear in hand, until Waroch and his cohorts fell upon him, and put him to death.'[150] If Fredegund's seemingly benevolent decision to release prisoners had a sinful motivation, perhaps her other, religiously motivated benefactions to St. Martin's did as well.

Any positive aspect of Fredegund's promised benefaction to the saint disappeared only a few chapters later, when Gregory recounted how she had ended a dispute among three men from Tournai by inviting them to a banquet, only to have a trio of henchmen sneak up behind the disputants and cut off their heads in unison, 'at which point the feasting drew to a close', Gregory added dryly.[151] Gregory, therefore, did not expect his audience to be impressed by her acts of piety, since they were no indication of the disposition within her rotten heart. Rather than showing devotion to God out of a deep sense *reverentia*, as the truly pious did in Gregory's works, Fredegund simply sought to harness spiritual forces, good or bad, for her own self-interested purposes.[152] Even though Fredegund accepted the reality of the divine, she

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[148] Hist. 10.11, '*et sic puer melius agere visus est.*'

[149] Hist. 10.11, '*Quod ita Warocus implevit. Unde manifestatum est, huius mulieris conludio et Beppolenum interfectum et exercitum fuisse conlisum.*'

[150] Hist. 10.9, '*Die autem tercia, cum iam qui cum eo erant interfecerentur, atque ipse sauciatus lancia repugnaret, inruentibus super eum Waroco cum supradictis, interfecerunt eum.*' The Breton campaign is discussed in Goffart, 'Foreigners', p. 275, 286-287; and Rosenwein, 'Writing', p. 29. On Gregory and the Bretons, see Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 294-298. On the *Saxones Baiocassini*, whom Fredegund used as reinforcements, see Yorke, 'Gregory', pp. 118-120; Claude Lorren, 'Des Saxones en Basse-Normandie au Vie siècle?', *Studien zue Sachsenforschung*, 2 (1980), 231-259; and Michel Rouche, 'Les Saxons et les origines de Quentovic', *Revue du Nord*, 59 (1977), 457-478.

[151] Hist. 10.27, '*...ab epulo est discessum.*'

[152] On the concept of *reverentia* in Gregory's works, see Brown, 'Relics'. pp. 230-235.

did not exactly possess the quality of faith, and her mere acknowledgement of the existence of God was unlikely to impress an audience familiar with the biblical admonition that 'even the demons believe, and they tremble with fear.'[153] Fredegund's version of piety was rather more like some of the women who occasionally featured in Gregory's hagiography as examples of misunderstood or misplaced devotion. For example, the wife of a certain Maurus tried to appease St. Lupus, who had struck her husband insane for violating the sanctuary of his church, by donating many gifts to the church, but, when Maurus died rather than receive a cure, the woman took her donations back. [154] Gregory was clearly unimpressed with this *quid pro quo* interpretation of piety, and he elsewhere mentioned two different women who had given thanks to God at St. Martin's shrine, even though they had not received their desired cures, and who were later miraculously cured thanks to this act of faith.[155]

If Fredegund's impure motives and association with witchcraft tainted her attempts to cultivate the favour of God's saints, then Brunhild's reputation surely gained from the absence of any similar blemishes upon her piety. Gregory not only mentioned her decision to convert to Catholicism, but, as discussed above, he also regarded her deceased sister, Galswinth, as a wonderworking saint.[156] And, while Fredegund sought to use black magic to her own advantage, Brunhild was nearly the victim of witchcraft, in the type of plot that Fredegund, irrationally, feared would happen to her. The Austrasian nurse of the royal children (*nutrix infantum*), Septimima, had planned to kill Brunhild's son Childebert through sorcery, and to banish his wife and his mother, in order to elevate his young sons to the throne. Gregory, unlike in his accounts of Queen Fredegund persecuting alleged witches out of paranoia, cast no doubt on Septimima's confession, though it was elicited under torture. He even added that she had also admitted using sorcery to kill her husband, for the sake of her lover, Droctulf, who was himself involved in the plot against Childebert.[157] Moreover, when Septimima and Droctulf's co-conspirators took sanctuary in various churches, Gregory noted that Brunhild's son, Childebert, had showed restraint, proclaiming: 'We are

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[153] James 2:19, '...et daemones credunt et contremescunt.'
[154] GC 66.
[155] VM 2.54, 2.56.
[156] Hist. 4.27, 4.28.
[157] Hist. 9.38. On the plot of Septimima, see Hofmann, 'Men', pp. 203-209.

Christians, and it is an egregious crime to remove someone from a church for punishment.'[158] The accused were given a trial, and, although their punishments were severe, none of them were executed, including Septimima and Droctulf, who were guilty of treason, witchcraft, and murder: all capital offences. Brunhild's mercy, as with her other qualities, stands in contrast to Fredegund, who sought to use spiritual power for impure purposes, and who was willing to employ unparalleled cruelty in pursuit of her aims.

Considering Gregory's desire to present Brunhild and Fredegund as moral opposites, it may be necessary to reappraise his characterisation of the two as political rivals, locked in an uncompromising feud, which he indicated on several occasions in the *Historiae*.[159] For example, Gregory had Fredegund declare that she wanted two assassins to kill Childebert, 'so that, at long last, Brunhild, whose arrogance is propped up by the boy's existence, might be toppled and subjected to my will.'[160] Fredegund's rationale required no further explanation than a reference to her perception of Brunhild as her *ipsa inimica*, even though she had good political motivations for attempting to assassinate Childebert, who had recently become Guntram's adopted heir to the exclusion of her own son Chlothar II.[161] The clearest example of this occurred in Gregory's description of a dialogue when King Guntram asked Felix, Bishop of Bellay, if he had forged a bond (*amicitia*) between Brunhild and Fredegund, 'the enemy of God and man,' to which Felix reassured the king that that nothing of the sort had, or ever could, take place: 'The same sort of *amicitia* endures between them that has issued forth these many years previous... the hatred that has hitherto existed in their midst, far from withering, instead grows anew.'[162]

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[158] Hist. 9.38, '*Christiani enim sumus; nefas est enim vel criminosus ab ecclesia eductus puniri.*' In Hist. 9.12, when the fugitive Berthefred was slain by Childebert's agents while taking sanctuary, Gregory absolved the king of guilt by stating that he was unaware of that fact that Berthefred had taken refuge within a church, Hist. 9.12.

[159] Gregory's interpretation was followed, for example, by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Bloodfeud of the Franks', in *Long-Haired Kings*, pp.121-147 (at pp. 133-135); and Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 275-277.

[160] Hist. 8.29, '*...ut tandem, Brunichildis, quae ab illo adrogantiam sumit, eo cadente conruat, mihique subdatur.*'

[161] Hist. 7.33.

[162] Hist. 9.20, '*inimicam Dei atque hominum Fredegundem,*' and, '*illae amiciciae inter easdem custodiuntur, quae ante hos annus plurimus sunt legti... odium, quod inter illas olim statutum est, adhuc pullulat, non arescit.*' On the use of *amicitia* to signify political allegiance, see Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 24-28; and Wolfgang Fritze, 'Die fränkische Schwurfreundschaft der Merowingerzeit: Ihr Wesen und ihre politische Funktion', in *ZSR GA*, 71 (1954), 74-125 (at pp. 94-105). Gregory referred,

As will be suggested in the following chapter, Brunhild and Fredegund may have both been involved in the alliance between Austrasia and Neustria, which lasted from 581 to 583. This short-lived political realignment has often been seen as the result of disaffected Austrasian officials, who gained control of the court and sealed the alliance against Brunhild's wishes, based largely on the assumption, following Gregory, that Brunhild could never have actually sought to ally with the contemptible Fredegund.[163] Gregory employed this view of the queens, however, as part of his overall literary strategy of using the similarities between the careers of Brunhild and Fredegund in order to accentuate their moral differences. His presentation of Fredegund as an irrational, hateful, and wicked queen, who stood in opposition to her benign rival, Brunhild, had no room for an embarrassing detail such as the short-lived rapprochement between the Neustrian and Austrasian royal courts, in which Fredegund and Brunhild exerted substantial influence. Of course, Gregory was not inventing some of the moments when the two came into conflict, such as Fredegund's murder of Brunhild's husband Sigibert. But Merovingian kings had no difficulty putting past hostility aside, when it was politically expedient, and there is no reason to believe that the queens Brunhild and Fredegund were any different.

Conclusion

If not for Gregory's interpretation, one might naturally conclude that Brunhild and Fredegund were rather similar – not only in regards to the details of their careers, but in terms of their moral conduct as well. Both were accused of harassing certain bishops, and even murdering bishops, yet both clearly had their supporters within the episcopate. Venantius Fortunatus was willing to compliment both on their love for their children, although later sources thought that both had been capable of treating their offspring callously. This is not to suggest that the two queens were exactly the same in regards to their moral conduct, but, even if Brunhild was less sinful than Fredegund, she still committed plenty of acts that might have offended the sensibilities of a righteous man, and Gregory was not usually inclined to overlook such faults in the

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vaguely, to 'Bishop Felix' in the passage, and the identification of this Felix with the Bishop of Bellay is arrived at though a process of elimination. On Felix of Bellay, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 143; and Duchesne, *Fastes*, III, 218.

[163] See Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 275-277; and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bloodfeud', pp. 133-135.

Merovingian rulers of Gaul. It is significant, therefore, that Gregory decided to pass over Brunhild's faults, and to make her appear benevolent by drawing parallels between her and Fredegund, whose sins he accentuated in intense detail. This was a complex literary strategy, and, removed from its context, Gregory's information on Brunhild might otherwise seem ambiguous. This may have resulted from an embarrassing paucity of good deeds available to relate about the Austrasian queen, or from Gregory's expectation that his contemporary audience would not be receptive to a simplistic panegyric of Brunhild, if the image of her found in the later writings of Jonas of Bobbio and Fredegar is closer to the truth. However, the precise reasons Gregory had for employing his various literary strategies in order to achieve this presentation of the two queens must be sought in an analysis of his own relationship with both Brunhild and Fredegund, which is the subject of the following chapter of this study.

IV

BRUNHILD, FREDEGUND, AND THE WRITING OF THE HISTORIAE

The bishops of the Merovingian kingdoms were necessarily politicians. They were drawn from the upper ranks of society, and their office brought financial, social, and spiritual resources that were of interest to the ruling powers of Gaul.[1] Naturally, such political associations had their risks, and although a bishop's priestly character commanded respect, sacrality was no guarantee of security.[2] In many ways, Gregory exemplified these circumstances, since he belonged to an important senatorial family, and since he was bishop of a metropolitan diocese that changed hands between the different Merovingian kingdoms more than once during his tenure.[3] Unsurprisingly, his relationship with the various rulers of Gaul influenced what he wrote in his *Historiae*, as well as what he omitted. For example, scholarship has called attention to the ways in which Sigibert, Chilperic, and Guntram each impacted the contents of Gregory's writings, since they each ruled Tours at different times during Gregory's episcopate.[4] In addition to these kings, however, it may be necessary to add Queen Brunhild to the list, since she enjoyed prominence in the Austrasian court as Sigibert's wife at the beginning of Gregory's tenure, from 573 to 575, and again from 584 onwards as the mother of Childebert, first in cooperation with Guntram and then outright following his death in 592. This latter period corresponds with last few years

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[1] On the Merovingian episcopate, see Bernhard Jussen, 'Über 'Bischofherrschaften' und Prozeduren politisch-sozialer Umordnung in Gallien zwischen 'Antike' und 'Mittelalter", *HZ*, 260 (1995), 673-718; Friedrich Prinz, 'Die bischöfliche Stadtherrschaft im Frankenreich vom 5. bis 7. Jahrhundert', in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 217 (1974), 1-35; Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft*; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 71-101; Reinhold Kaiser, 'Königtum'; id., 'Royauté et pouvoir épiscopal an nord de la Gaule (VIIe-IXe siècles). Résultats d'une recherche en cours', in *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850*, 2 vols (Sigmaringen, 1989), II, 143-160; Edward James, 'Beati pacifici: Bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul', in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. by John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 25-46; Scheibelreiter, *Bischof*; Dietrich Claude, 'Der Bestellung der Bischöfe im merowingerischen Reiche,' *ZSR GA*, 80 (1963), pp. 1-17; and Hinschius, *System*, IV, 849-857.

[2] See the analyses of Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 21-28; and Friedrich Prinz, 'Herrschaftsformen der Kirche vom Ausgang des Spätantike bis zum Ende der karolinger Zeit: Zur Einführung ins Thema', in *Herrschaft*, pp. 1-17 (at p 8).

[3] On Gregory's pastoral and civic responsibilities in Tours, see Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 313-326.

[4] See, for example, Wood, 'Secret', p. 257; and Halsall, 'Nero', p. 347. On Guntram's death, see Fredegar, 4.16; and Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 4.11. Gregory mentioned Guntram's death in VM 4.38.

of Gregory's life, when he subjected the *Historiae* to their final revisions, and so Brunhild's impact on the work was understandably significant. Even when Tours was not under the queen's political control, Gregory may have been inspired to treat her with respect in his writings, considering his own personal connections to the Austrasian court.[5] Consequently, some of the most circumspect passages within the *Historiae* are those concerning Brunhild's political manoeuvrings, to an extent that may even surpass the discretion that Gregory showed towards Chilperic and Guntram during the time in which they each held sway over Tours.

In contrast to this discretion, Gregory's account of Fredegund is remarkable for its candour, as he accused the queen of an array of crimes, including murder, sacrilege, and sorcery. Unlike Brunhild, Fredegund had very little influence in Tours after 584, when the city passed out of Neustrian control. Indeed, Fredegund never seems to have had the same degree of prominence as her Austrasian counterpart had enjoyed, even during her husband's lifetime, and Gregory justifiably felt confident that he was beyond her reach, so long as he did not say anything about her that might anger the king. It is noteworthy, therefore, that one crime remains absent from the litany of accusations that he hurled at her – adultery. Unlike the other offenses, which insulted Fredegund's character alone, the charge of sexual infidelity raised doubts about the paternity of her children, who were heirs to the throne. Such an accusation was naturally an affront to her husband Chilperic, but, even after his death, it remained an affront to Guntram, who had acquired hegemonic rule over Neustria by his adoption of Chilperic's son, Chlothar II. Significantly, Gregory had once been put on trial by Chilperic on the suspicion that he had rumoured the queen was an adulteress. One might fairly doubt whether Gregory had been so foolish as to speak such an accusation openly, and he was acquitted at trial, but there are very subtle moments within the *Historiae* that, when read closely, do indeed seem to imply doubt about Fredegund's sexual fidelity. Therefore, Fredegund also left her mark on the *Historiae* in ways that were less than obvious, and in passages that were not ostensibly about her or her rival queen.

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[5] For an analysis of Gregory's Austrasian connections with an emphasis on Sigibert and Childebert, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 201-207.

Gregory, Brunhild, and the Austrasian Court

There is some evidence to connect Gregory to Brunhild directly. However, a more thorough understanding of the relationship between the two only becomes apparent once Gregory's deep connections to the Austrasian court in general are observed, combined with a subsequent analysis of Brunhild's prominence at court throughout her career. As has been observed earlier in this study, Gregory owed his appointment as Bishop of Tours to the personal intervention of Sigibert and Brunhild, and he was consecrated in the Austrasian capital of Rheims.[6] Presumably, in order to acquire this favour Gregory had been a regular figure at court from the mid-560s onwards.[7] Furthermore, Gregory was probably required to take an oath of loyalty to Sigibert upon his consecration, and perhaps also to the king's successor, the young Childebert, whose reign (575-596) lasted beyond Gregory's lifetime.[8] Oaths were no light matter for Gregory, and his *sacramentum* may go far in explaining his enduring loyalties to the Austrasian crown, which he seems to have kept throughout his career. For example, Gregory used Childebert's regnal years as the chronological framework for Books 5-10 of the *Historiae*, even though Tours was in the possession of Chilperic and Guntram for most of those years.[9] He also served as a diplomat on behalf of the kingdom on more than one occasion. In 585, for example, he visited with Childebert at Koblenz, where he met with Burgundian envoys and insisted to them that the young Austrasian king remained committed to his alliance with Guntram.[10] Similarly, Gregory also met Childebert at Metz in 588, when he was instructed to travel as an envoy to Guntram's court at Chalon-sur-Saône, where he personally assured the Burgundian king that the

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[6] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.3.

[7] Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 30. On Gregory's connections to Clermont, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 30-50, 200-207. Gregory may have been in attendance at Brunhild's marriage to Sigibert in Metz c. 566. This was a critical moment for the young Venantius Fortunatus, who presented an epithalamium for the royal couple that brought him to the attention of important Merovingians and essentially started his career in Gaul. It is possible that the two lifelong friends met on this occasion. See Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 6.1; with George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 4-5; and George, *Personal*, p. xix.

[8] Martin Heinzelmann, 'Bischof und Herrschaft vom spätantiken Gallien bis zu den karloingischen Hausmeiern: Die institutionellen Grundlagen', in *Herrschaft*, pp. 23-82 (at pp. 72-73).

[9] Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 148-151 and n. 11 .

[10] Hist. 8.13; cf. Hist. 8.15-17, which mentions a stay at Childebert's court, which probably refers to this trip in 585, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 215-216. Note Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 61, '...dagegen läßt er an seiner Rolle als Friedensvermittler zwischen dem burgundischen und austrasischen Herrscher keine Zweifel.'

Austrasians intended to honour the Treaty of Andelot, signed in the previous year.[11] Gregory may also have been involved in the negotiations leading up to Andelot, as demonstrated earlier in this study.[12] Gregory, therefore, may well have been regarded as something of an insider to the royal court by his contemporaries throughout his career.

Any familiarity with the Austrasian court naturally suggests a connection with Queen Brunhild, assuming that she enjoyed an enduring prominence within the kingdom during Gregory's lifetime. There are, in fact, few reasons to doubt that this was the case, even if Brunhild suffered moments of uncertainty at different points during her career. She certainly seem to have been an influential figure during her husband's reign, in part because of her considerable financial resources, which included the wealth she had brought with her from Spain and the sizeable *morgengabe* given to her by her husband. [13] According to Gregory, Brunhild's detractors remembered Sigibert's reign as a time in which she had participated in the governance of the kingdom, and this claim finds some confirmation in the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus.[14] Furthermore, Brunhild was at her husband's side during his campaign against Chilperic in 575, and, when Germanus of Paris wished to intervene to end the conflict, he chose to correspond with her under the assumption that she was best placed to influence the crown and court, discussed further below.[15] Naturally, Brunhild suffered in the aftermath of her husband's assassination, when she was captured by Chilperic and sent to Rouen, and Gregory referred to this as Brunhild's moment of indignity (*contumelia*).[16] But it did not last long, and even in the midst of disgrace she was not without resources. She managed to purchase the loyalty of certain noblemen who were keen to seek Chilperic's downfall, and she was important enough for

[11] Hist. 9.20. Gregory travelled to Metz with his friend, Venantius Fortunatus. See Meyer, *Gelegenheitsdichter*, p. 22; and Koebner, *Venantius*, pp. 208-209.

[12] See Chapter I.

[13] Gregory commented on the size of this treasure in Hist. 4.27. On the political circumstances of the marriage, see Nelson, 'A propos'; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 121-123, 169-175; and Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 115-123. On Brunhild's *morgengabe*, see Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 123-128. On the access to the royal treasury of Merovingian queens, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 104-105.

[14] George, *Latin Poet*, p. 158. On the view that Fortunatus's information does not reflect the realities of Merovingian queenship, see Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 120.

[15] Hist. 4.51; Germanus of Paris, *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 9. Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 175. See Nelson, 'Queens', p. 10; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 127.

[16] Hist. 5.1; 6.4; 9.9. On the insecurity that could surround a royal woman at the moment of her widowhood, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 175-178.

Chilperic's son, Merovech, to marry her, in his efforts to acquire power in Gaul, also discussed further below.[17] By 577 Brunhild had returned to Austrasia, and she had apparently re-secured her position at court, enjoying what seems to have been a cooperative relationship with Gogo, the official guardian (*nutricius*) of her son.[18] Gogo had been an important figure in Sigibert's court, and he worked closely with Brunhild's faithful servant Lupus.[19] During his tenure, Brunhild was able to enter into negotiations with the Visigoths through the intermediary of Bishop Elafius of Châlons-sur-Marne, whose appointment she may have facilitated.[20] Thus, it did not take Brunhild long to emerge from her *contumelia* with renewed levels of influence in the kingdom.

Brunhild seems to have enjoyed the same sort of prominence during the tenure of Gogo's successor as *nutricius*, Wandelen, who served from 581 to 584.[21] This pertains, at least, as long as one does not see the political realignment that took place between 581 and 583, when Austrasia shifted its allegiances away from Burgundy and toward Neustria, as having been against her wishes. This was the view of Godefroid Kurth, whose groundbreaking study of the queen has remained influential in this

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[17] Hist. 5.1, 5.18, 9.9; Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', pp. 74-75; Thilo Offergeld, *Reges pueri: Des Königtum Minderjähriger im frühen Mittelalter* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2001), pp. 201-214; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 127-128. On Brunhild's possible reasons for marrying Merovech, see Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 280-281.

[18] Hist. 5.46. Brunhild may have behind the snubbing of Merovech when he fled to her in 577, after his bid for power failed, only to be turned away *ab Austrasiis*, as Gregory obscurely put it (Hist. 5.14). On Gogo, see Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 77-93; Riché, *Education*, pp. 222-223, 238; George, *Personal*, pp. 126-127; and George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 14, 136-140. On the collaboration between Brunhild and Gogo, see Bruno Dumézil, 'Gogo et ses ami: Écriture, échanges et ambitions dans un réseau aristocratique de la fin du VIe siècle', *Revue historique*, 643 (2007), 553-593; id., *Reine*, pp. 138-141; Nelson, 'Queens, p. 12; Zuckerman, 'Qui', p. 7; Goffart, 'Byzantine', p. 84, and n. 44; and Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 282-283. On female regency and relations with governors of minor kings, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 155-156. On the office of *nutricius*, see Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, pp. 162-165.

[19] The possibility that Gogo had served as the Austrasian *maior domus* under Sigibert is suggested in Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 7.4; see Riché, *Education*, p. 238, n. 414. Gogo had also been responsible for escorting Brunhild from Spain upon her betrothal; see Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 7.1. Lupus and Gogo were both patrons of Fortunatus, and the poet treated them as a pair, praising them for their joint administration of justice; see Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4; with George, *Latin Poet*, pp. 79-82, 136-140; and Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 14-21.

[20] Hist. 5.40. On Brunhild's relations with the episcopate in general, see Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels', pp. 24-29. Presumably, Brunhild and Gogo also cooperated in arranging the marriage of her daughter Ingund to the Visigothic prince, Hermenegild, in 579. See Hist. 5.38; and John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, anno 579.

[21] Wandelen's tenure is mentioned in Hist. 6.1 and 8.22.

regard since it was first published in 1891.[22] Kurth was led to believe that a faction at court hostile to Brunhild had seized power and arranged the alliance, on the grounds that she would never have agreed to a pact with the kingdom of her hated enemy, Fredegund. Kurth even named the leading members of the faction, by grouping together individuals who, at one time or another, had pitted themselves against her: Rauching, Guntram Boso, Ursio, Berthefred, and the bishop Egidius of Rheims, whom he saw as the head of the party. However, among these only Ursio and Berthefred can be seen opposing the queen specifically during Wandelen's tenure, when they attempted, with limited success, to bring about the downfall of her servant Lupus.[23] Indeed, with the exception of Ursio, each of these individuals can be identified as supporting Brunhild at other times in their careers, as demonstrated below, and only Egidius can be shown to have been involved in orchestrating the Austrasian alliance with Neustria; the involvement of others is an assumption based on later circumstances.

When Lupus went into exile, he sent his wife to find safety in Laon, which fell under Egidius's metropolitan oversight – an unlikely scenario if Egidius was then leading a faction opposed to the queen and her dependants.[24] Brunhild was clearly not without influence during Wandelen's tenure, since she was able to put Lupentius, the *abbas* of a church in Javols, on trial for *lèse majesté* and, perhaps, to arrange his subsequent murder, as discussed earlier in this study.[25] Brunhild also helped Innocentius, *Comes* of Javols, to secure a post as Bishop of Rodez at this time, at the expense of his rival, a priest named Transobad.[26] Transobad had been a former associate of Gogo, having entrusted his son into the household of the late *nutricius*, and thus this represents a moment when Brunhild was willing to depart from Gogo's

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[22] Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 283-288. See also the analyses of Walther Schultze, *Deutsche Geschichte von der Urzeit bis zu den Karolingern* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandung, 1896), II, 152-153; and Dill, *Roman*, pp. 184-206. The broader political context of the alliance is also discussed in Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 91-96. Goffart saw Wandelen's tenure as 'three years of frustration' for the queen (pp. 105, 108).

[23] Hist. 6.4. See Kurth, 'Reine', p. 285. Brunhild's fearless opposition to Ursio and Berthefred may well be taken as an indication of her strength, see Nelson, 'Queens', p. 12; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 128.

[24] Hist. 6.4, which is contrasted by the information presented in Hist. 9.14. On this point, see Bachrach, *Anatomy*, p. 207, n. 112.

[25] Hist. 6.37. Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 128.

[26] Hist. 6.38.

policies, suggesting that she may also have been willing to support the political realignment that took place after Gogo's death.[27] Admittedly, Brunhild had reasons to dislike the Neustrian rulers Chilperic and Fredegund, but she may have been willing to set these aside, in the interests of political expediency. Once the notion of an everlasting and unflinching hatred between Brunhild and Fredegund is seen as one of Gregory's literary constructs, fashioned in order to further contrast the two as moral opposites, then there remains no basis for the view that the alliance with Neustria was arranged against Brunhild's interests. After all, scholarship has been willing to accept similar instances of kings changing their allegiances, without needing to hypothesise aristocratic takeover at court.

Following Wandelen's death, Brunhild seems to have moved smoothly into a position of prominence, when she took over the guardianship of her son Childebert directly, without the appointment of another *nutricius*.[28] The continuity of Brunhild's security at court is further suggested by the fact that, in the same year, the Burgundian king Guntram affirmed his recognition of her son as his own heir, in accordance with an arrangement that had first been negotiated while Wandelen had still been serving as *nutricius*.[29] Subsequently, her prominence within Austrasia only increased, especially following the Treaty of Andelot in 587, when she secured for herself the inheritance of the five cities that had once been part of the *morgengabe* given to her sister, Galswinth.[30] It is at this time, and not the period between 581-583, that Rauching, Ursio, and Berthefred can be seen placing themselves at odds with Brunhild, when they attempted to oust the queen during the build-up to Andelot, during a failed *coup d'état*. Guntram also fell victim to intrigue on the eve of the treaty, when he was nearly killed by an

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[27] Transobad's connections to Gogo are mentioned in Hist. 5.46. Goffart saw the Austrasian alliance with Neustria as a reversal of Gogo's policy, see Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 91-96. For the view that alliance had actually been Gogo's idea, see Bachrach, *Anatomy*, pp. 47-49.

[28] Hist. 8.22. Childebert reached majority in 585, see Ewig, 'Studien', p. 22; and also *Epistolae Austrasiacae*, 44, which was written in 585 and suggests that the prince had just come of age.

[29] Hist. 7.33. On the so-called 'Treaty of Pompierre' (mentioned in Hist. 5.17), see Schneider, *Königswahl*, pp. 117-121; and Lynch, *Godparents*, pp. 179-180. On the significant of Pompierre, close to Guntram's domains and along the road from Metz to Chalon-sur-Saône, see Dalton, *History*, II, 540-541; and Auguste Longnon, *Géographie de la Gaule au VIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1878), p. 372. On adoption amongst the Merovingians, see Eckhardt, *Studia*, pp. 240-260; Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 46-61; and Max Papenheim, 'Über künstliche Verwandschaft im germanischen Rechte', *ZSR GA*, 29 (1908), 304-333 (at 315-322).

[30] Hist. 9.11, 9.20. See Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp 130-131; Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', p. 78; and Nelson, 'Queens', pp. 12-13.

assassin during mass in his Burgundian capital of Chalon-sur-Saône.[31] The failure of both coups demonstrates that Brunhild, like Guntram, was secure enough to thwart her enemies, and, following the rumours of another very poorly organised *coup d'état* in 590, Brunhild used the opportunity to purge whatever possible opposition to her remained at court.

Once Brunhild's prominence in the Austrasian court is recognised, it becomes possible to see Gregory's connections to the court as evidence of his own loyalties to the queen. At a minimum, one can safely assume that the political purge that had occurred in 590 gave Gregory sufficient reason to appreciate the threat that Brunhild posed to those who crossed her. In addition to this circumstantial case, however, more specific evidence for a relationship between the bishop and queen can be found in her promotion of the cult of St. Martin of Tours, whose shrine was under Gregory's direct oversight. Brunhild commissioned a church dedicated to St. Martin to be built in Autun, which she may have intended it to be her final resting place.[32] Assuming that Brunhild had relics of Martin installed in the church, as was customary, then her most obvious source for these relics was Gregory's shrine in Tours. Similarly, when Brunhild was fleeing from Chilperic in Rouen, she took sanctuary in a church dedicated to Martin along the city walls – perhaps indicating that the saint held a certain significance for her.[33] Fortunatus, at least, assumed that Brunhild was interested in St. Martin when he travelled with Gregory to the Austrasian court at Koblenz and delivered a poem detailing the merits of the saint to Childebert and his mother, in honour of the saint's summer feast.[34] Brunhild certainly stood to gain from associating

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[31] Hist. 9.3, 9.8-11, 9.38. Gregory mentioned a similar attempt on Guntram's life in Hist. 7.8. Ironically, there may have been a prayer for the welfare of the king at a fixed point in the Merovingian liturgy, see Jean Mabillon, *De liturgia Gallicana libri III* (Paris: Edmund Martin and Jean Boudot, 1685), 1.3.11.

[32] Gregory I, *Registrum Epistolarum*, 13.5.11. On the church as Brunhild's possible burial site, see Karl Krüger, *Königsgrabkirchen der Fränken, Angelsachsen und Langobarden bis zur Mitte des 8. Jahrhunderts: Ein historischer Katalog* (Munich: Fink, 1971), p. 161; Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 26; Kruth, 'Reine', pp. 347, 352-356; and also Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, p. 42. On Brunhild and Syagrius, the Bishop of Autun, see Prinz, *Frühes*, pp. 33, 60-61; Nelson, 'Queens', p. 26; and Riché, *Education*, pp. 268-270.

[33] Hist. 5.2. On the church, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 245-246.

[34] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 10.7. He probably also addressed several other poems to Childebert and Brunhild at this time: *Carmina*, 10.8, 10.9, appendix 5, and appendix 6; see George, *Latin Poet*, p. 33; and George, *Personal*, p. 97, n. 1. St. Martin had two feasts, one on 4 July, and the other on 11 November; see Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 124 and n. 43; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 434, 468-484.

herself with Martin of Tours, especially since the late and greatly revered Queen Chlothild had spent most of her widowhood in the city.[35] Brunhild had included the element *chlodo-* in the name of her daughter Chlodosinda, recalling the memory of Chlothild and her husband Clovis (i.e. Chlodovech), as well as their son Chlodomer and grandson Chlodoald.[36] Brunhild's interest in Tours, its queenly legacy, and its saint, not only suggests that she maintained good relations with Gregory throughout his career, but it may also offer an explanation for her decision to involve herself in his appointment to the see in the first place.

The Composition of the Historiae

Gregory's relationship with the Austrasian court and its queen invites an analysis of the composition of the *Historiae*, since parts of it were written during moments in which Brunhild had influence within Tours. Gregory began to write the *Historiae* sometime after he became bishop in 573, perhaps as a response to the disastrous events of the mid 570s, especially the conflict between Sigibert and Chilperic, which culminated in the assassination of the former king in 575.[37] Books 5 and 6 were composed after Tours fell into the hands of Chilperic, from 576 to 584, while Books 7 through 10 were composed during the period of Burgundian hegemony, from 584 to death of Guntram in 592.[38] Gregory continued to work in the *Historiae*, however, until

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[35] Queen Ultrogotha may have had the same thing in mind, when she visited Martin's shrine in Tours as a devout pilgrim; see VM 1.12. Chlothild's activities in Tours are mentioned in Hist. 2.43 and 10.31. On royal women and the patronage of the cult of the saints in general, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 120-124.

[36] Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 133; also Ewig, 'Namengebung', pp. 31-34, 43.

[37] VM 1 (preface) indicates that it was Gregory's first work, and that it was begun after he became bishop. Fortunatus seems to have consulted a section of the VM in 576; see Bonnet, *Latin*, p. 13. Of course, it is possible that Gregory had written down notes about certain events earlier, which were later incorporated into his publications, as suggested by Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 41-50. On the inspiration for the *Historiae*, see Halsall, 'Preface', pp. 311-312. Halsall suggested that the preface to Book 5 might represent the earliest part of the work. This, together with the suggestion of Martin Heinzelmann that the first four books were originally intended as an independent publication, written in 575 or 576, is referenced in Chapter II.

[38] On this view, discussed further below, see Wood, *Gregory*, p. 3; Verdon, *Grégoire*, pp. 80, 84; Buchner, *Gregor*, I, vii-li; Krusch, 'Gregorii episcopi'; and Monod, *Études*, pp. 45-49. An opposing interpretation, also discussed below, was suggested by Alexander Callander Murray, 'Chronology and the Composition of the Histories of Gregory of Tours', in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 (2008), 157-196 (at pp. 162-174). On the political situation of Tours, see Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 265-274. The importance of the alliance between Burgundy and Austrasia in the late 580s for understanding the *Historiae* was observed by Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', p. 78.

his own death in 594, making his final revisions during the time in which Brunhild's influence in Tours was unmitigated.[39] Although the *Historiae* describe events only up to the summer of 591, the work's final computation of the age of the world calculates to either 593 or 594, and it is clear that Gregory was still writing at least into 593, when he recounted a meeting he had with Childebert in that year in his *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini.* [40] This explains why the *Historiae* include nothing objectionable to the Austrasian sensibilities of the early 590s, without representing only this perspective, since the revisions were not so extensive as to remove all traces of the earlier phases of composition. It is not possible, therefore, to agree with the view of Alexander Callander Murray, who argued that the *Historiae* were written in one process, without revision, sometime after 584 (as is discussed below). Nonetheless, it is possible to discern that Gregory's discreet presentation of Brunhild in the *Historiae*, and by extension his candid treatment of her literary doppelganger, Fredegund, can be explained through an analysis of the gradual composition of the work, with special attention to Brunhild's influence in Tours at the end of Gregory's life.

Although Gregory wrote at a distance removed from many of the events mentioned in Books 1-4, which cover the period from Creation to 575, in the remaining six books he seems to have recorded events roughly as they unfolded.[41] This is indicated by certain passages where he seems to have written in ignorance of later events. For example, when Gregory gave his account of Tiberius in Book 5, he stated that the exceedingly charitable emperor lacked nothing, because God was providing for his needs and would continue to do so.[42] This statement only made sense prior to Tiberius's death in 582, which Gregory mentioned in Book 6.[43] Similarly, Gregory

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[39] Krusch, 'Gregorii episcopi', pp. xxi-xxii, argued that Gregory left his *Historiae* unfinished. Whether or not Gregory finished his process of redaction, the overall coherence of structure present in the work, together with Gregory's admonition in the final chapter to leave it unchanged (10.31), indicates that the *Historiae* should be viewed more or less as a finished product.

[40] The problems concerning this calculation of years is detailed in Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 59-69. Gregory mentioned his meeting with Childebert in VM 4.37. In Hist. 10.21, Gregory mentioned Guntram's reputation in the past tense, and so it may have been written after the king's death in 592; see Murray, 'Chronology', p. 171, n. 47; and Widdowson, 'Merovingian', p. 20.

[41] Buchner, *Gregor*, I, p. xxii, 'Im ganzen scheint die Darstellung seit dem 5. Buch laufend und in verhältnismäßig geringem zeitlichen Abstand von den Ereignissen niedergeschreiben zu sein.'

[42] Hist. 5.19.

[43] Bonnet, *Latin*, p. 14. Tiberius's death is mentioned in Hist. 6.30.

described Hermenegild's rebellion in Books 5 and 6, but he only mentioned the prince's death (which occurred in 586) in Book 8, even though his earlier discussion had emphasised the tragic consequences of the failed revolt.[44] And when Gregory described a feud between Sichar and Chramnesind in Book 7, he seems to have been unaware of the eventual outcome, which he later narrated in Book 9.[45] Lastly, in Book 7 Gregory described a local dispute in Tours, which occurred in 584, introducing his account with the words, 'and in the present year' (praesenti quoque anno), suggesting that he wrote in the same year as the events occurred.[46] Of course, it is possible to interpret these examples differently, by explaining their peculiarities in terms of Gregory's literary concerns, such as a desire to add vividness or suspense to his narrative. But the rarity of instances such as these argues against this interpretation, since they cannot be considered a part of Gregory's normal stylistic repertoire. Moreover, such an interpretation would be unable to account for the fact that Gregory expressed different attitudes toward the same people at different times in the work.[47] Instead, it seems more likely that these examples represent relics of the gradual composition of the Historiae, which Gregory never fully smoothed out in his process of revision.

If the incremental composition of the Historiae is evidenced by moments when Gregory lacked foresight, then his later revision of the work is demonstrated by the moments when he exhibited the benefit of hindsight. For example, in Book 5, which was first written no later than 584, Gregory concluded his account of one of Rauching's more heinous crimes by observing that the dux fittingly met an ignominious end, even though this did not occur until in 587.[48] Likewise, Gregory's account of the fall of Antioch and Apamea to the Persians in the early 570s, which he narrated in Book 4, may have been based on information he had learnt from the eastern bishop Simon,

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[44] Hist. 5.38, 6.43, 8.28. See Krusch, 'Gregorii episcopi', pp. xxi-xxii. For other evidence suggesting that discrepancies in Gregory's account of Hermenegild's rebellion resulted from the gradual influx of information, see Goffart, 'Byzantine', pp. 107-108 and n. 158.

[45] Hist. 7.47, 9.19. See Buchner, Gregor, p. xii. Against this interpretation, see Goffart, Narrators, p. 125, n. 56. The fragmentary nature of Hist. 7.47 was explained by an appeal to the common knowledge of Gregory's audience by Martínez Pizarro, Rhetoric, pp. 41-42.

[46] Hist. 7.23. See Monod, Études, p. 48.

[47] On this point, see Wood, 'Secret', p. 254.

[48] Hist. 5.3. Monod, Études, p. 46; also Halsall, 'Nero', p. 344.

who visited Tours in 591 and described the Persian conquests to Gregory personally.[49] In a somewhat different example, in Book 4 Gregory inserted into his account of Nicetius's tenure as Bishop of Lyons a reference to his *vita* of the saint in the *Liber vitae patrum*, which was written after 585.[50] Since Book 4 was written in the 570s, the cross-reference must represent a later interpolation.[51] Adriaan Breukelaar counted twenty-one other examples of cross-referencing between the *Historiae* and Gregory's other works, which feature in every book except 6 and 7.[52] Although not every cross-reference necessarily represents an interpolation, their sheer ubiquity suggests that the *Historiae* were subjected to a process of redaction, which Gregory made in view of his entire corpus. Because of this, it is possible to see the *Historiae* as the product of the early 590s, no matter the original date of each book or the sporadic nature of the revisions.[53] This is not intended to diminish the importance of the passages that show the marks of an earlier time, but Gregory's decision to leave them unaltered even after subsequent developments represents a conscious choice made in the context of the early 590s, even if only because he considered them inconsequential. In other words, the form of the *Historiae* to which Gregory added his injunction not to alter any of the text under penalty of damnation (*cum diabolo condamnandi*) is the product of the twilight of his life, at a time when Tours had finally returned to the sole dominion of Austrasia, including its queen, Brunhild, who had first appointed Gregory to his episcopal post two decades previously.

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[49] Hist. 4.41, 10.24. See Buchner, *Gregor*, II, 382, n. 4.

[50] Hist. 4.36; VP 8.

[51] Monod, *Études*, p. 46.

[52] Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 54-55. Breukelaar cautioned against using such cross-references in reconstructing the chronology of the *Historiae*, given 'the present state of inquiry into the chronology of Gregory's other works,' p. 51.

[53] See the comments of Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 124-125; Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', pp. 50-51; and Monod, *Études*, p. 45. Monod also held that Gregory's process of redaction should include the six-book recension of the *Historiae*, extant in the earliest manuscripts of the work, pp. 39-49, an interpretation which is no longer tenable. Instead, the six-book recension represents a seventh-century attempt to expunge Gregory as a character in the narrative of his own work; see Helmut Reimitz, 'Social Networks and Identity in Frankish Historiography: New Aspects of the Textual Tradition of Gregory of Tours' Historiae', in *Construction*, pp. 229-268. Walter Goffart gave a different interpretation of the motive behind the recension, but he agreed that Gregory had not been responsible for it; see his, *Narrators*, pp. 121-127; and id., 'From Historiae to Historia Francorum and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours', in *Rome's Fall*, pp. 255-274 (at pp. 271-274).

In an article published in 2008, Alexander Callander Murray also noted that Brunhild and Childebert must be taken into consideration when analysing the historical context of the *Historiae*, but he did so because he thought that Gregory had written the work entirely after the mid-580s, during Childebert's reign over Tours (through the consent of his adoptive father, Guntram, until the latter's death in 592), i.e. several years removed from much of what he described.[54] While it is possible to agree that the shadow of Brunhild and Childebert loomed over the *Historiae*, this cannot be done to the exclusion of Chilperic, and the earlier phase of writing pre-584. Although this view only offers to strengthen the points made here concerning Brunhild's relationship with Gregory and her impact on the content of the *Historiae*, it is simply too strained of an interpretation to be incorporated into this present hypothesis. Murray believed that the narrative of the *Historiae* contained such an extended continuity of thought that the entire text ought to be seen as a work of hindsight, designed and completed in one outburst of creativity late in Gregory's life. Certainly, the narrative of the *Historiae* possesses a remarkable degree of coherence, but it contains certain inconsistencies as well, and the weakness of Murray's interpretation is its inability to account for these, which he attempted to explain away through a lengthy and encumbered series of arguments.[55] The strength of the view that the *Historiae* were written gradually and redacted at a late date is precisely its ability to encompass both the consistencies and inconsistencies with the narrative. Neither is it especially clear why Murray believed that the idea of gradual composition, and its acknowledgement of the dissonance present in Gregory's narrative, necessitates a return to the outdated view that the Bishop of Tours was naive, or that the *Historiae* lacked a coherent overall structure.[56] The inconsistencies of the *Historiae* are the result of a process of revision, rather than the absence of an overall plan. Indeed, evidence of revision is evidence of structure, and, therefore, of planning.

Murray provided no explanation for why Gregory, who began writing his hagiography in the early 570s, would have waited until the late 580s to write history. Presumably, one would have to consider the possibility that Chilperic posed too

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[54] Murray, 'Chronology', p. 193.

[55] Murray, 'Chronology', pp. 178-186 (on the coherence of the narrative of the *Historiae*), and pp. 162-174 (which attempted to dispense with the inconsistencies).

[56] Murray, 'Chronology', pp. 188-194.

significant of a threat for him to dare to write about political events until after the king's death in 584. And by extension, Gregory's willingness to write after Chilperic's death, during the reign of Childebert and his mother, would suggest that the two Austrasian rulers were not especially threatening. This, however, is not consistent with the conclusion that Murray reached, since he thought that a late date for the *Historiae* contradicted the view that King Chilperic's shadow loomed large over the composition of the work, and that attention should instead be given to Brunhild and her son.[57] Once one recognises that Gregory composed the *Historiae* gradually, and that he later redacted some of his earlier chapters, it becomes possible to account for the entire range of Merovingian rulers who influenced the contents of the work: Sigibert and Brunhild (573-575), Chilperic (575-584), Guntram, who ruled as the adoptive father of Childebert, and who was allied with the boy's mother Brunhild (584-592), and, lastly, Brunhild and Childebert outright (592-594). Among these rulers, Brunhild's influence deserves special emphasis, since anyone connected to the royal court of Austrasia was advised to stay on friendly terms with the queen, given the level of influence she enjoyed in the kingdom. Indeed, Gregory's loyalties to the Austrasians stretched back to his appointment to the see, which he owed in part to Brunhild's personal intervention, and, in addition to this, she seems to have taken a keen interest in the cult of St. Martin of Tours, which was Gregory's responsibility. Whether Gregory's regard for Brunhild derived mostly from fear or admiration, it was never more prudent an attribute than in the early 590s, when Austrasia was purged of those officials who had fallen afoul of the queen. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that Brunhild received very careful treatment in the *Historiae*, approaching or perhaps even surpassing that which Chilperic and Guntram received.

The Merovech Affair

Gregory's regard for Queen Brunhild caused him to pass over the queen's faults in the *Historiae*, and to make her appear benevolent by contrasting her with Queen Fredegund, who was subjected to a litany of accusations. It also shaped the way in

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[57] On the view that Gregory expressed himself with caution in Books 5 and 6 prior to Chilperic's death (mentioned in 6.46), see Wood, 'Secret', pp. 255-257. On Murray's criticism of Wood, see 'Chronology', pp. 189-194.

which he described certain key events that involved the queen. In 575, for example, the recently widowed and momentarily threatened Brunhild married Prince Merovech, who was attempting to establish himself in Gaul at the expense of his father, Chilperic.[58] Although Brunhild seems to have been the only person involved who ultimately gained from the affair, since she escaped the exile that she had suffered following her husband's assassination and returned her to prominence in the Austrasian royal court, her deliverance is almost unnoticeable in Gregory's narrative. Indeed, Gregory had little interest in providing information about the queen, and his reason for describing the Merovech affair in the first place seems to have been simply the need to contextualise his lengthy passages on the prince's attempt to gain sanctuary within St. Martin's church in Tours, and the trial of Praetextatus, both of which were recounted in the same book of the *Historiae*.[59] Insofar as Brunhild appears in Gregory's account, it is only as the passive victim of circumstance. Thus, when Gregory mentioned the murder of Sigibert, he presented Brunhild as the stereotypically distraught widow – 'so beside herself in her lamentation and grief that she knew not what to do.'[60] According to him, the queen had allowed herself, her daughters, and her treasure to be captured by King Chilperic, while only *Dux* Gundovald acted decisively, saving the life of her son Childebert by evacuating him from Paris and having him proclaimed king. Chilperic's elevation to the kingship, however, happened on Christmas Day, 575, months after Sigibert's sudden demise during the campaign season of the same year, giving Brunhild plenty of time to recover from paralyzing grief.[61]

Unsurprisingly, Fredegar had a different view of the queen, and he did not present her as too distraught to act. Instead, he omitted any mention of her grief, and he even entertained the idea that she had orchestrated Sigibert's murder in the first

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[58] It has been argued that Merovech married Brunhild in order to acquire power in Austrasia; see Schneider *Königswahl*, pp. 96-97; Bund *Thronsturz*, p. 265; Nelson 'Queens', pp. 10-12; Zuckerman 'Qui', p. 7; and Ewig, 'Studien', p. 33. That power in Neustria was instead the prince's primary objective, see Hofmann, 'Men', pp. 134-137; and Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, p. 203. On the general motivations behind usurpers and incoming kings who decided to marry royal widows, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 49-54.

[59] For an account of Merovech's revolt focusing on his stay in Tours, see Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 278-284. This importance this event had in shaping the contents of the *Historiae* was discussed by Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 124-125.

[60] Hist. 5.1, '...conturbata dolore ac lucto, quid ageret ignoraret.'

[61] See Kurth, 'Reine', pp. 279-280.

place.[62] Of course, one might naturally be suspicious of this accusation, but it is fairly clear that Brunhild was not powerless during her exile at Rouen. Even from Gregory's partisan account of the trial of Praetextatus, it is evident enough that the Bishop of Rouen had used Brunhild's wealth to purchase the loyalties of certain men, who were to seek Chilperic's downfall.[63] It was at this time, also, that a disobedient Merovech came to Rouen and married Brunhild, in a ceremony presided over by Bishop Praetextatus. The prince had been dispatched by his father with an army (*exercitus*) to Poitiers, presumably in order to establish Neustrian control over the former Austrasian city, but he instead went to Tours, where he gathered supplies over Easter, and then to Rouen, where he married the widowed Austrasian queen.[64] Presumably, Brunhild had been involved in bringing about her marriage to Merovech, and her presence at the prince's side was taken as a threat by Chilperic, who came hurriedly (*citio*) to Rouen, intent on addressing the brewing rebellion. Gregory's account of the subsequent events is highly implausible. On the one hand, he wrote that Brunhild and Merovech took sanctuary in a church atop the city walls, and that Chilperic failed in his attempts to lure them out 'by many dirty tricks' (*in multis ingeniis*), because the couple 'would not fall for them' (*non crederent*). On the other hand, he wrote that, when Chilperic gave Brunhild and Merovech his word (*iuravit eis*) that he would not separate them, they accepted his oath, left the church, and met him with open arms.[65] It is difficult to believe that the two were suspicious of Chilperic's 'clever ways' (*dolosae*), but that they were also willing to take him at his word. This discrepancy was not lost on the author of the *Liber historiae Francorum*, who added the adverb 'falsely' (*dolose*) to his account of Chilperic's oath, and the king's subsequent embrace of the couple, which he drew from Gregory's text – even though he had pro-Neustrian sympathies.[66]

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[62] Fredegar 3.72, 4.42.

[63] On Brunhild's assets, see Nelson, 'Queens', p. 10; and Dumézil, *Reine*, p. 182.

[64] Hist. 5.1, 5.4. For the view that Chilperic intended Merovech to lay claim to the former Austrasian city of Poitiers, see Bachrach, *Merovingian*, p. 46. Although Merovech had disobeyed his father when he decided to come to Tours, he may not have been seen as engaging in a rebellion until his marriage to the Austrasian queen; see Hofmann, 'Men', pp. 129-132.

[65] Hist. 5.2.

[66] LHF 33.

Gregory's narrative is also curious in the inexplicable disappearance of the *exercitus* that Merovech had at his disposal.[67] Although Gregory's reasons for this omission must remain undetermined, it had the result of recasting the conflict in Rouen, which may have taken the form of a siege, as a matter of sanctuary, transforming Brunhild from a hostile combatant into a penitent refugee. Indeed, if one hypothesises that Chilperic's *dolosae* were actually ruses designed to break a siege, then his eventual decision to give his word not to separate the couple might be understood as an offer of truce, made between two armies at stalemate.[68] This interpretation may also make sense out of the following passage, where Gregory described an attack on Chilperic's capital at Soissons by some men from Champagne (*aliqui de Campania*), while the king was confronting Merovech and Brunhild at Rouen.[69] This assault was led by Godin, a former servant of King Sigibert, and it apparently also involved Siggo, the former Austrasian *referendarius* and royal ring-bearer, who had temporarily shifted his allegiances to Chilperic after Sigibert's assassination. It is tempting to speculate, therefore, that Brunhild had been involved in influencing these former Austrasian officials to lead the attack on Soissons at the same time in which she and Merovech were under arms in Rouen, especially since Praetextatus admitted to using Brunhild's wealth to purchase the loyalties of certain men around this time, who were to seek Chilperic's downfall. Indeed, Champagne was a region under the oversight of Brunhild's *fidelis*, the *dux* Lupus, who may therefore have been involved in organising the attack on Soissons.[70] This hypothesis might also explain why Chilperic became suspicious of his son Merovech after he had defeated the forces assailing Soissons, 'on account of his marriage to Brunhild' (*propter coniugationem Brunechildis*), which caused him to break his oath that he had made to the prince, separating him from Brunhild and ordering him to be stripped of his arms, placed under guard, and, later, forced into monastic confinement at Le Mans.[71] While this reconstruction must remain speculative,

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[67] Hist. 5.1. Julia Hofmann observed the oddity, hypothesising that the army may have remained loyal to Chilperic, 'Men', p. 130. Although possible, this does not make the disappearance of the army from Gregory's narrative any less conspicuous.

[68] For a detailed examination of a Merovingian siege (that of Gundovald at Bertrand-de-Comminges), see Bachrach, *Anatomy*, pp. 119-148.

[69] Hist. 5.3.

[70] Hist. 6.4 See Bachrach, *Merovingian*, p. 47.

[71] On Merovech's confinement, see Mayke de Jong, 'Monastic Prisoners or Opting Out? Political Coercion and Honour in the Frankish Kingdoms', in *Topographies*, pp. 291-328, (at pp. 306-307).

of course, given Gregory's reluctance to provide certain details, it highlights the disjoined and implausible nature of his narrative, and the need to find a resolution by observing Brunhild's agency in the events in question.[72]

The best example of this obscurity present in Gregory's narrative is the sudden and unexplained appearance of Brunhild at the Austrasian court, several chapters after he had last mentioned Brunhild taking sanctuary in Rouen. In the intervening chapters, Gregory had described in detail the plight of Merovech, who fled from Chilperic by taking refuge in a number of places in Gaul before finally seeking out his wife in Austrasia, only to be turned away – without ever describing how Brunhild had returned to the kingdom in the first place.[73] The author of the *Liber historia Francorum* found the omission conspicuous enough to insert an explanation, which must have been no more than a guess, that Brunhild's son Childebert had asked Chilperic to return his mother to him.[74] The *LHF* author was not the only one unsatisfied with Gregory's narrative, and its characterisation of Brunhild as a passive figure, swept up in these events orchestrated by others. It also seems to have been too much for a seventh-century scribe, who produced a redacted version of the *Historiae*, and who changed the grammatical structure of Gregory's description of the marriage between Brunhild and Merovech. Gregory had written of Merovech: 'He brought her into matrimony, and was married to Queen Brunhild there [in Rouen]', according to the oldest textual tradition of the *Historiae*.[75] This phrasing was in keeping with standard Latin marital terminology, which always rendered the man as the grammatical subject,

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For the view that Chilperic was correct in his suspicions, see Kurth, 'Reine', p. 281; and Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, p. 204.

[72] Fredegar was at a loss with Gregory's information, and his account even more staccato, see Fredegar 3.74.

[73] Hist. 5.14. See Nelson, 'Queens', p. 12.

[74] LHF 33.

[75] Hist. 5.2, '...*ibi Brunichildae reginae coniungitur eamque sibi in matrimonio sociavit*'. This is the reading of a ninth-century manuscript held at the monastery of Micy, which contains fragments of the *Historiae* that were composed no later than circa 650, labelled as A2 in the edition of Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison. On the manuscript transmission of the *Historiae*, see Hilchenbach, *Vierte*, I, 7-90; Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 167-175; id. and Pascal Bourgain, 'L'Œuvre de Grégoire de Tours: la diffusion des manuscrits', in *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois*, ed. by Nancy Gauthier and Henri Galinié (Tours: Fédération pour l'édition de la Revue archéologique du Centre, 1997), pp. 273-317; Krusch, "Gregorii episcopi', pp. xxii-xxxviii; id., 'Die handschriftlichen Grundlagen der Historia Francorum Gregors von Tours 1', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 27 (1932), 673-757; and id., 'Die handschriftlichen Grundlagen der Historia Francorum Gregors von Tours 2: Die Handschrift von Namur und ire Verwandten (C2*, 3, 3*, 4)', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 28 (1933), 1-21.

bringing his bride into matrimony – a construction that Gregory used consistently everywhere else in his writings.[76] The seventh-century scribe, however, altered the passage to read, 'she brought [him] into matrimony...', which recognised Brunhild as the active agent behind the politically motivated marriage (assuming, of course, that the emendation of Gregory's accusative *eam* into the nominative *ea* was intentional).[77] These two examples highlight the conspicuous reluctance Gregory had in crediting Brunhild with any agency during the events following her husband's assassination, from the elevation of her son to the kingship, to her return to the Austrasian court.[78]

It is difficult to believe that Brunhild was wholly passive during these events, especially since, of all the participants, she seems to have come out the best. Merovech escaped from monastic confinement only to live as a fugitive, until he was tricked by the people of Thérouanne, who feigned to make him their ruler in order to capture him. Rather than face his father's wrath, he took his own life.[79] Gregory emphasised the failure of Merovech's bid for power, and he presented his suicide ignominiously, although the prince may have seen himself as following the Roman notion of an honourable *suicidium*, asking his associate Gailen to run him through with his *gladius*.[80] Praetextatus also suffered for his support of Brunhild, since he was tried, exiled, and eventually assassinated by Fredegund, who never waivered in her contempt for the ally of Brunhild. Chilperic's former wife, Audovera, also seems to have lost out as a result of the rebellion of Merovech, who was her son by the king. She had been living in Rouen since Chilperic had dismissed her from his side in the 560s, and, when Merovech had originally gone to the city in order to marry Brunhild, he had done so

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[76] Karras, 'History', pp. 145-147.

[77] '...*ea quoque in matrimonio sociavit.*' This is the reading of the five B-class manuscripts, which date from the late-seventh to the early-ninth centuries, and which contained a six-book redaction of the *Historiae*; see Heinzelmann and Bourgain, 'L'Œuvre', p. 282. Normally, the B-class manuscripts concur with the A2 fragments. The eleventh century A1 manuscript agrees with the reading found in the A2 fragments. Both Fredegar (3.74) and the author of the LHF (33), who drew their text of the *Historiae* from the recension preserved in the B-class manuscripts, nonetheless rendered Merovech as the grammatical subject, in keeping with convention.

[78] I would like to thank Julia Hofmann, who called the issue of Gregory's language to my attention at the Leeds International Medieval Conference (2008). My interpretation differs from the one she offered in her 'Men', pp. 125-126, because she preferred the reading found in the B-class manuscripts.

[79] Hist. 5.18.

[80] Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), II, 42.

under the pretext of visiting his mother.[81] She may have been more involved than this, since she, like Merovech, was threatened by Fredegund, who wished to see her children alone inherit a share of the kingdom.[82] In 580, after Merovech had died and Audovera's other son Chlodovech had been assassinated by Fredegund, Chilperic had his former wife put to death.[83] Indeed, of all those involved in Merovech's rebellion, only Brunhild seems to have gained from the episode, and, while this does not necessarily mean that she had been its mastermind, it certainly suggests that she had a more active role than Gregory indicated. Indeed, the many discrepancies in Gregory's narrative suggest that he was reluctant to provide more than the most basic and widely known details about Brunhild's involvement in the political manoeuvrings of the late 570s.

The Conspiracies of 587 and 590

While Gregory was discreet in his presentation of Brunhild, he was candid in his evaluation of her enemies at court. In 587, Ursio and Berthefred conspired with the *dux* Rauching in an attempt to kill Brunhild's son Childebert and rule in his stead, which failed when Guntram discovered the plot and informed Childebert about those who were in league against him.[84] The three conspirators each died as a result, and in the aftermath of their failed *coup d'état* Guntram Boso also fell foul of the king on suspicion of treason, and consequently met his demise.[85] Within the *Historiae*, Gregory presented Ursio, Berthefred, Rauching, and Guntram Boso as thuggish reprobates who had long and treacherously opposed Queen Brunhild. This interpretation was certainly prudent following the events of 587, when hindsight and political expediency merged to provide Gregory with overwhelming justification for his portrayal of the four men as longstanding, nefarious conspirators. There are some hints, however, that suggest these magnates had each served Brunhild dependably at an earlier time, which can be discerned from a careful reading of certain passages within the *Historiae* that were written prior to 587. In 590, another plot came to Brunhild's the attention, and in the

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[81] Hist. 5.2.
[82] Hofmann, 'Men', pp. 137-144; Dumézil, *Reine*, pp. 185-186.
[83] Hist. 5.40.
[84] Hist. 9.9.
[85] Hist. 9.10.

process of investigating this conspiracy information was uncovered implicating Egidius of Rheims in the earlier plot of 587.[86] In describing Egidius's subsequent trial, Gregory made little effort to defend his fellow bishop's innocence, even though the case against him was rather weak, and even though Egidius had once consecrated Gregory to the episcopate. Indeed, as will be examined below, it seems that Gregory was far closer to Egidius than he wished to reveal, and that he made great efforts to distance himself from his former colleague. Again, Gregory seems to have been inspired to present his information on a particular Austrasian official in terms that were acceptable in the early 590s, indicating that Brunhild's impact on the contents of the *Historiae* reached far beyond those passages that dealt with her directly.

Gregory's presentation of Guntram Boso is characteristic of this point. After mentioning the death of the *dux*, Gregory launched into an invective: 'he was trifling in his conduct, and eager in his greed, desiring what others had beyond measure; he made vows to all and kept them to none.'[87] Gregory thought that Childebert was justified in his condemnation of Guntram Boso, because the *dux* had 'often assailed Queen Brunhild with abuse and derision'.[88] In an earlier passage within the *Historiae*, however, Gregory had hinted that Guntram Boso had some redeeming qualities, even if he was untrustworthy, writing: 'In truth Guntram was otherwise good, but he was altogether too willing to take false oaths, and moreover he never made a pact with his allies that he was not just as soon ready to forget.'[89] The statement that Guntram Boso was *vero alias bonus* seems out of place in the *Historiae*, but it is in keeping with a passage in the *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, where Gregory described how the *dux* had acted heroically when his boat capsized on the Loire. Guntram Boso invoked the intercession of St. Martin, who worked a miracle that saved him and his men.[90] The words of the invocation, 'Be not afraid – I know that the right hand of the saint is at the ready to offer help whenever needed,' are reminiscent of the biblical words of Jesus himself, when he calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee by uttering, 'be not afraid' (*nolite*

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[86] Hist. 10.19.
[87] Hist. 9.10, '*Fuit autem hic in actu levis, avariciae inhians, rerum alienarum ultra modum cupidus, omnibus iurans et nulli promissa adimplens.*'
[88] Hist. 9.8, '*Brunechildem reginam saepe conviciis atque inproperiis lacessibat.*'
[89] Hist. 5.14, '*Gunthchramnus vero alias bonus – nam in periuriis nimium praeparatus erat – verumtamen nulli amicorum sacramentum dedit, quod non protinus omisisset.*'
[90] VM 2.17.

timere).[91] Gregory's uncharacteristic moment of praise for Guntram Boso may have been the product of a time when the *dux* was in the service of Austrasia, before he ran afoul of Brunhild.[92] There is one passage in the *Historiae* that hints at Guntram Boso's former loyalties to the queen. When Merovech had escaped from the monastic confinement forced upon him by his father, Guntram Boso had invited him to come to Tours and join him in taking sanctuary in St. Martin's church. Later, when Chilperic sent an army to retrieve both his fugitive son and the *dux* from sanctuary, Merovech considered fleeing to Brunhild and taking Guntram Boso with him.[93] This statement necessarily implies that Merovech had assumed that Guntram Boso would have been welcomed by Brunhild, even if it carried little weight in Gregory's account, since he had also claimed that Guntram Boso had secretly been in the service of Fredegund, and that he had worked with the Neustrian queen to arrange Merovech's assassination. Guntram Boso, therefore, must have been seen as an associate of the Austrasian queen at this time. In the aftermath of 587, however, Gregory had no reason to call attention to Guntram Boso's former service to Brunhild.

In a similar way, Gregory presented Rauching as a sadistic villain within the *Historiae* – 'a man replete with every vanity, swollen with pride and reckless in self-aggrandizement, who dealt with his inferiors in such a manner that he seemed to lack all humanity.'[94] Gregory recounted how Rauching had tricked two slaves to come out of a church where they were taking sanctuary in order to have them buried alive, simply because they had married without his consent. Rauching also forced another slave to hold a candle between his own legs, knowing that it would burn the man's thighs, so that he could enjoy a candlelit dinner – 'if [the slave] were to make a noise or move from his spot, at once he would be threatened by a ready sword, since Rauching took such great joy in seeing him weep,' Gregory added.[95] His account of the *dux* was

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[91] VM 2.17, '*Nolite timere; scio enim, quod dextera sancti viri ad auxilia porregenda maxime in necessitatibus sit parata.*' See Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50, John 6:20.

[92] Gregory must surely have written it before he wrote Hist. 8.21, in which he recounted that Guntram Boso had been put on trial by Childebert for desecrating a church by robbing the grave of a woman buried within its walls.

[93] Hist. 5.14.

[94] Hist. 5.3, '*vir omni vanitate repletus, superbia tumidus, elacione protervus, qui se ita cum subiectis agebat, ut non cognusceret in se aliquid humanetates habire.*'

[95] Hist. 5.3, '*Quod si vocem emittere aut se de loco [illo] alia in parte movere conatus fuisset, nodus ilico glaudius imminibat, fiebatque, ut, hoc flente, iste [Rauchingus] magna laetitia exultaret.*'

clearly informed by hindsight, since he referenced Rauching's ignominious death when he first introduced him in the *Historiae*, as mentioned above. In spite of this, there are some traces remaining in the text that suggest Rauching was able to set aside his swollen pride and self-aggrandizement long enough to serve Brunhild's cause during the earlier part of his career. For example, in 581 Rauching seized the *dux* Ennodius on the suspicion that he had once stolen from the treasury of Brunhild's husband, Sigibert. After searching Ennodius's household and discovering certain items that indicated his guilt, Rauching sent him to Brunhild's son Childebert for judgement.[96] Around this time, Rauching also intervened to stop two assassins, who had been dispatched by Fredegund, from stabbing Brunhild and Childebert with poisoned daggers. Thus, Rauching had not always been an enemy of the queen, and his participation of the plot of 587, which involved Neustrian support in an effort to kill Childebert, clearly represents a change in loyalties. This is similar to the other members of the conspiracy, such as Berthefred, who had once been so close to Brunhild that she had agreed to act as the godmother of his daughter.[97] Therefore, the notion that Rauching belonged to a discernable bloc at court that had long been opposed to the queen derives mostly from Gregory's presentation of the *dux* and his cohorts as equally and consistently wicked to the core – a perspective most prudent in the aftermath of the failed coups of 587 and 590.

Gregory's account of Egidius, and especially his trial on charges of treason, is particularly illustrative of this point. Egidius had first come under suspicion in the aftermath of the conspiracy of 587, but he managed to convince Childebert of his loyalty.[98] After the second attempt against the crown in 590, however, Egidius again found himself implicated in the original conspiracy, and he had to defend himself at trial.[99] Considering the lengths that Gregory had gone to in his defence of Praetextatus, discussed earlier in this study, one might naturally have expected him to do the same with Egidius, especially since the Bishop of Rheims had once consecrated him to the episcopate.[100] Indeed, in his account of Praetextatus's trial, Gregory wrote that it was

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[96] Hist. 8.26.
[97] Hist. 9.9. See Lynch, *Godparents*, p. 196; and Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 225-228.
[98] Hist. 9.14.
[99] On Egidius's trial, see Wood, 'Secret', pp. 267-268; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 97-98; and Hinschius, *System*, IV, 855, n. 1.
[100] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.3.

wrong to persecute a bishop, that Chilperic stood to lose 'both his kingdom and his legacy,' and that the king would surely 'perish in his fury against one of God's ministers,' if he did so.[101] Gregory made no effort to defend Egidius, however, even though the case against him was rather weak. Indeed, Gregory did not even mention whether or not he had attended the convocation of bishops summoned to try Egidius at Verdun in the November of 590. Likewise, when Gregory recorded that there had been protests made against Egidius's imprisonment prior to the trial, he noted that such objections were raised by *alii sacerdotes*, carefully disassociating himself from the bishop's supporters. Gregory may well have felt nervous about his own obvious connections to Egidius, as he neglected to mention his consecration in Rheims at the bishop's hand, and as he apparently obscured his cooperation with Egidius in negotiating the Austrasian rapprochement with Neustria.[102] Gregory's account of Egidius, therefore, represents an interpretation shaped by the circumstances of the early 590s.

The principal evidence used against Egidius was his own collection of letters, which, according to Gregory, contained 'many disparaging remarks toward Brunhild,' although he was not specific about their contents.[103] Gregory did mention, however, that another letter, written by King Chilperic to Egidius, contained an incriminating statement: 'if the root of something is not cut, then the stalk, which rises from the ground, will not wither.'[104] This was taken as a coded message from the king informing the bishop that Brunhild needed to be eliminated, although such an interpretation hardly seems definitive. One might suspect that the evidence taken from Egidius's own writings had been similarly cryptic. Egidius denied writing the incriminating letters, and it is tempting to believe his claim that they were forged, rather than that he had knowingly retained documents incriminating him in the *coup d'état* of 587 for three years following its failure. This line of defence had worked a few years previously for Charterius, Bishop of Périgueux, who had been investigated in 582 by Chilperic after two of his messengers were arrested carrying letters which contained disparaging

101 Hist. 5.18, '...*ne exardiscens in ministrum Dei pereat ab ire eius et regnum perdat et gloriam.*'
102 On Gregory's silence about the details of his own appointment, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, p. 30; Wood, 'Individuality', p. 43; Wood, *Gregory*, p. 11; Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 247-249; and Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 63.
103 Hist. 10.19, '*multa de inproperiis Brunichildis*'.
104 Hist. 10.19, '*radix cuiuslibet rei incisa non fuerit, culmis, qui terris est editus, non ariscit.*'

remarks toward the Neustrian king. [105] Just as in Egidius's case, Charterius's amanuensis was summoned to testify that he had written the material in question upon his superior's express instruction, but, in this case, the evidence had been regarded as insufficient. When Egidius's amanuensis affirmed the authenticity of the letters, however, the testimony was considered damning – 'the bishop was unable to refute it', Gregory wrote unsympathetically. [106] Egidius produced even more evidence on his behalf, including a different set of documents, which showed that domains allegedly given to him by Chilperic had actually been given to him by Childebert. Ironically, these were judged a forgery, and the charge of perjury was added to his list of alleged crimes. There was apparently no explanation given as to why Egidius would have undertaken the effort to forge such documents, which only partially absolved him of guilt, while simultaneously failing to destroy the incriminating ones.

Besides disloyalty to King Childebert, Egidius was also accused of treason against King Guntram, when Epiphanius, the *abbas* of St. Remigius's church in Rheims, testified that Egidius had taken money and gifts from Chilperic in order to facilitate Guntram's downfall. While it was true that Egidius had visited Chilperic's court and discussed plans to oust Guntram from Burgundy, he had done so during the rapprochement between Austrasian and Neustria from 581-583, when such plans were in keeping with the express wishes of King Childebert. [107] In other words, Egidius's efforts to remove Guntram from power should have been taken as evidence that he had been loyal to Childebert. In the political climate of the early 590s, however, any prior associations with the rapprochement of the early 580s were a liability. Gregory followed Epiphanius's lead, asserting that Egidius had come under suspicion previously for his familiarity with the Neustrian court, when he had been suspected of complicity in Merovech's death on account of his friendship with Fredegund, and when he had been the object of a revolt within the lower ranks of the Austrasian army sent on a campaign against King Guntram during the rapprochement. [108] Even if Egidius had really been this close to the Neustrian court in the late 570s and early 580s, such connections must have been seen as an asset by the Austrasian court from 581-

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[105] Hist. 6.22.
[106] Hist. 10.19, '*Haec episcopus negare non potuit.*'
[107] Hist. 6.3, 6.31.
[108] Hist. 5.18, 6.31.

583, when Egidius was called upon to secure the alliance with Neustria. The only other evidence offered against Egidius at his trial was the statement that he had been involved in the conspiracy against Brunhild and Childebert in 587 given by Sunnigisel, the former Austrasian *Comes Stabuli*, which had been extracted under prolonged torture.[109] In other words, Egidius may have been something of a scapegoat, convicted, laicised, and then exiled in an effort to forget the now inconvenient pro-Neustrian policy of the early 580s, and to purge anyone of potentially divided loyalties.[110]

Gregory was certainly wise to distance himself from Egidius, especially since he too may have been involved in negotiating the rapprochement between Austrasia and Neustria. Like Egidius, Gregory had also met with Chilperic in 581, just before his colleague arrived to discuss the alliance between the two kingdoms. Gregory, however, denied that his visit had any political motive, writing merely that he had been shown some gifts sent to Chilperic by the Byzantine emperor, and that he had engaged in a theological debate with a certain Priscus.[111] Similarly, Gregory seems to have gone to Rheims in 583 to meet with Egidius, just before Egidius went to visit Chilperic as part of an Austrasian embassy.[112] Although Gregory did not connect his meeting with Egidius to the diplomatic negotiations, his obscurity is conspicuous, especially since he was equally vague when, in his hagiography, he mentioned that he had visited with Egidius 'for some reason' (*causa quaedam*) between Christmas 582 and Easter 583.[113] Indeed, Gregory was a natural point of contact during the negotiations between the two kingdoms, since he was an Austrasian loyalist whose diocese had recently fallen under Neustrian control.[114] To an extent, Gregory's ability to retain his post after Chilperic acquired dominion over Tours may have resulted from the king's desire to exploit Gregory's contacts with the Austrasian court.[115] It is little surprise, then, to find that Gregory went to great lengths to distance himself from Egidius, and to fashion an

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[109] Hist. 9.38, 10.19.
[110] On Egidius as a possible scapegoat, see Wood, 'Secret', pp. 267-268; id., *Gregory*, p. 20; id., 'Individuality', p. 43; and id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 97-98.
[111] Hist. 6.2, 6.5. On the treasure, see Hendy, *Studies*, pp. 262-263.
[112] Hist. 6.27, 6.31. See Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 267, n. 81.
[113] VM 3.17. See Halsall, 'Nero', p. 345.
[114] See Halsall, 'Nero', pp. 344-346; Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 73; Wood, *Gregory*, p. 20; id., 'Secret', pp. 267-268; and id., 'Individuality', p. 43.
[115] Cf. Wood, 'Individuality', p. 43.

account of his former colleague within the *Historiae* that kept to the official, post-590 Austrasian view of past events.

Fredegund and the Content of the Historiae

In describing Egidius's downfall at the hands of an Austrasian tribunal, Gregory was recounting an event similar to his own prior experience. In 580, he had been brought to the Neustrian town of Berny-Rivière and placed on trial by King Chilperic, under the charge that he had spread a rumour slandering Queen Fredegund as an adulteress. This may have left an impression upon him, since he never accused Fredegund of adultery directly in the *Historiae*, although he does seem to have implied as much very subtly. The most likely explanation for this uncharacteristic discretion is that the charge of adultery was different from the other allegations, since it threatened more than Fredegund's reputation alone. Naturally, Chilperic took the accusation as a personal slight, since it raised the possibility that his sons were illegitimate, threatening his lineage and posterity.[116] Even after Chilperic's death, however, the question of Fredegund's fidelity remained a politically sensitive issue for King Guntram, since he had justified his hegemonic rule over Neustria by adopting Chilperic's only surviving heir, the young Chlothar II. Gregory, therefore, could not slander her as an adulteress with the same impunity that he had otherwise enjoyed, when he accused her of murder, sacrilege, sorcery, and the like.

Gregory first came under suspicion in 580, when Leudast, who had recently lost his position as *Comes* of Tours, reported to Chilperic that Gregory had conspired to wrest the city from Neustrian control; and when this accusation failed to impress the king, Leudast added that Gregory had been spreading a rumour that Fredegund was unfaithful.[117] Chilperic was unable to ignore the second charge, and so he summoned

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[116] Wood, 'Secret', p. 258. On the frequent use of adultery as a charge against a queen to undermine an heir's right to rule, see Stafford, *Queens*, pp. 94-98, 125; also Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 158. On bishops questioning the legitimacy of royal offspring, and its political consequences, see Fouracre, 'Why', pp. 21-22. Of course, Merovingian legitimacy involved questions of more than mere paternity, see Wood, 'Kings', pp. 10-14; and id., 'Deconstructing', pp. 161-164.

[117] Hist. 5.47. Leudast had perhaps been removed from his office since, in the previous year, Tours had failed to provide men for a Neustrian campaign against Brittany (Hist. 5.26). On Gregory's conflict with Leudast, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 202-204; and Pietri, *Ville*, pp.

Gregory for trial at Berny-Rivière.[118] During the course of the proceedings, however, Leudast admitted under torture that he had conspired with some of Gregory's clerical enemies in Tours to oust Fredegund from court, to murder her sons and her husband, and to elevate Chilperic's offspring from another woman to the throne. His attempt to see Gregory charged with *lèse-majesté*, therefore, had been something of a smokescreen, which also had the potential to denigrate Fredegund on the eve of the conspiracy against her. Gregory wrote with a sense of pride and vindication that 'an inferior person is not to be believed over a bishop,' recounting Leudast's despicable rise to power from the ranks of servitude, and that he still bore the boxed ear of a runaway slave.[119] With the suspicions turned on Leudast, Gregory was allowed to acquit himself by saying mass at three altars and swearing his innocence.

Although Gregory indicated that his life had been placed in real jeopardy at Berny-Rivière, this was called into question by Guy Halsall.[120] In an article published in 2002, Halsall observed that Gregory had inserted an account of a theological debate he had had with Chilperic out of chronological sequence in the *Historiae*, in a passage that actually described events on the eve of the trial, and this resulted in a discrepancy. Gregory had written that he had confronted Chilperic over one of his royal decrees, which proclaimed that God's oneness made no allowances for a distinction between three persons of the Trinity, and that he had denounced such views as heretical to the king, who became enraged (*iratus*).[121] Halsall pointed out that such behaviour was not what one might expect from a bishop fearing for his life, and therefore that Gregory's account of the danger he faced at his trial was probably an exaggeration made for dramatic effect. It is undeniable that tension exists between Gregory's claim that his life was in danger at Berny-Rivière, and that he had boldly denounced Chilperic on the eve

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285-289. On episcopal relations with the local *comes* in general, see Heinzelmann, 'Bischof', pp. 63-68.

[118] Hist. 5.49. On Gregory's trial, see Halford, *Archaeology*, pp. 11-12; Halsall, 'Nero', pp. 340-341; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 86-87; id., 'Secret', pp. 257-258; id., 'Individuality', p. 44; id., *Gregory*, pp. 14-16; Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 70-73; and William McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes: A Merovingian Bishop', *Traditio*, 31 (1975), 1-24 (at 13-18).

[119] Hist. 5.49, '...*non potest persona inferior super sacerdotem credi.*'

[120] Halsall, 'Nero', pp. 340-341.

[121] Hist. 5.44. This was one of several policies that Chilperic undertook in apparent imitation of Byzantine emperors, which Gregory took as pure foolishness; see Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 96-98.

of the trial, but it is unclear why the former claim should be seen as the exaggeration, rather than the latter.

It is equally plausible that Gregory fabricated his account of himself confronting the king on a matter of orthodoxy in order to present himself as something of a biblical prophet, and that, in truth, he had not denounced the heretical decree as boldly as he wished his audience to believe. While there is no corroborating evidence for Gregory's account of his confrontation with Chilperic, some evidence does exist that supports his characterisation of the trial as a moment of danger. Gregory's friend, Venantius Fortunatus, composed a panegyric on Chilperic at this time, apparently in an effort to move the king to clemency.[122] Similarly, a seemingly unrelated comment in Gregory's hagiography indicates that he suffered from a string of migraine headaches at the time, which might be taken as evidence of the stress he was under due to the looming trial.[123] When he was put on trial, his enemies at Tours thought that he was as good as dead, and they began inventorying the treasury of the cathedral, as was required on the death of a bishop.[124] Thus, one can acknowledge that a contradiction is present in Gregory's account of events, without concluding from this that his trial had been a rather benign experience. Moreover, it is possible that early parts of the *Historiae* may have been kept in the cathedral treasury, and that his enemies had scanned them for incriminating evidence, much like the writings of Charterius and Egidius.[125] If so, then the trial at Berny-Rivière may have taught Gregory what not to write about the rulers of Tours in the *Historiae*, in addition to the more general point that Fredegund's fidelity was not a topic to be treated lightly.

Gregory seems to have taken his experience at Berny-Rivière seriously, since he avoided accusing Fredegund of adultery directly in his works. Nonetheless, he seems to have raised the charge indirectly, through the subtle tactic of innuendo. In the first

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[122] Fortunatus, *Poems*, 9.1; with Judith George, 'Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus's Panegyric to King Chilperic', *Journal of Medieval History*, 15 (1989), 5-18. Halsall provided a different interpretation of this evidence, 'Nero', p. 342, n. 23.

[123] VM 2.60. See Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 72, and Wood, 'Individuality', p. 44. One might also call attention to Gregory's statement that Chilperic's daughter Rigunth was concerned enough to fast, together with her household, on Gregory's behalf (Hist. 5.49).

[124] Wood, *Gregory*, p. 16; cf. Hist. 5.49; Orléans, 6.

[125] Wood, *Gregory*, p. 16; id., 'Secret ', p. 257, 259; and id., Ian Wood, 'Letters and Letter-Collections from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: The Prose Works of Avitus of Vienne', in *The Culture of Christendom*, ed. by Marc Anthony Meyer (London: Hambeldon Press, 1993), pp. 29-41 (at pp. 41-42).

example, Gregory described a vision he had one night, after he had fallen asleep, when he saw an angel pass above his church and proclaim: 'Alas, alas, God has stricken Chilperic and all his sons, for there shall not be a single one he has sired who shall survive to rule his kingdom in perpetuity.'[126] Gregory then added that the angel had appeared to him at a time when Chilperic had several sons, but that the prophecy was later fulfilled. The passage appears in his description of events in 577, and it was not until 580 that all of Chilperic's sons had died; he remained sonless until the birth of Theuderic in 583, who lived only briefly, and again until the birth of Chlothar in 584, in the same year as Chilperic's assassination.[127] Since Chlothar II went on to inherit his father's kingdom, and to outlive Gregory himself, his birth seems to make a mockery of the prophecy, and especially Gregory's proclamation of its fulfilment. For this reason, the passage recounting the vision has been dated sometime between 580 and 584, when it would have made sense.[128] Yet, whatever the circumstances may have been when Gregory originally wrote the passage, his decision to leave it unaltered seems to represent an attempt on his part to put his audience in a dilemma – forced to believe either that the angel had been wrong, or that Chlothar had not actually been Chilperic's son.[129] Indeed, if one assumes that Gregory believed in the vision himself, then he would have been put in the very same dilemma. Gregory had mentioned the vision in order to demonstrate an example of true revelation, after recounting with distain the false prophecy of a soothsayer, who had predicted that Prince Merovech would come to rule all of Gaul. Thus, Gregory risked embarrassment by referencing the angelic vision if it had been obviously false, and without apparent reason, since it

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[126] Hist. 5.14, 'Heu heu! Percussit Deus Chilpericum et omnes filios eius, nec superavit de his qui processerunt ex lumbis eius qui regat regnum illus in aeternum.' Gregory wrote that he celebrated vigils at the church and then fell asleep on his lectulus, which may make this an example of Christian incubation; see Moreira, Dreams, p. 120 and n. 49 (and pp. 96-99 on Gregory's visions involving Chilperic generally); and de Nie, Views, p. 229.

[127] Hist. 6.23, 6.34.

[128] Wood, Gregory, p. 49; Buchner, Gregor, I, xxii; and Rudolf Köpke, 'Gregor von Tours', reprinted in Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte: Politik und Literatur, ed. by F. G. Kiessling (Berlin: Mittler, 1872), pp. 289–321 (at p. 310).

[129] Wood, 'Deconstructing', pp. 158-164; Murray, 'Chronology', pp. 169-171; Sigmund Hellmann, 'Studien zur mittelalterlichen Geschichtschreibung. I. Gregor von Tours', in Historische Zeitschrift, 107 (1911), 1-43 (at 27-29).

was not necessary to resort to a counterexample in order to demonstrate the falseness of the soothsayer's prophecy after Merovech's ignominious death in 587.[130]

In light of this, two other passages within the *Historiae* seem curious. First, in Book 8 Gregory described Chlothar circumlocutiously as 'the son who is said to be of Chilperic' (*filius, qui esse dicitur Chilperici*), implying a sense of doubt about the identification.[131] This example is especially odd, as Gregory elsewhere described Chlothar straightforwardly as Chilperic's son, such as when he recounted Guntram's acquisition of hegemonic authority in Austrasia and Neustria by adopting the young kings Childebert and Chlothar.[132] This passage, however, may have seemed a particularly appropriate place to insert a muted attack against Chlothar's paternity, since it appeared within a lengthy account characterising Fredegund as a woman of no morals. Second, Gregory described an aborted attempt to baptise Chlothar in 584, in which he referred to the boy as 'whom they were already calling Chlothar.'[133] By inserting the word 'already' (*iam*), Gregory expressed surprise that the infant had received his Merovingian name before the baptismal ritual, in a rushed attempt to legitimise the prince on the part of Fredegund and her Neustrian supporters.[134] There is some evidence to suggest that Merovingian princes were normally given their royal name upon baptism, even though the naming of children was not fully linked to the ritual until the tenth century.[135] Gregory certainly gave this impression in the *Historiae*, when he mentioned that Chilperic's son Theuderic, as well as Clovis's sons Ingomer and Chlodomer had been given their Merovingian names upon their baptism, and that

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[130] Hist. 5.18.

[131] Hist. 8.31; Wood, 'Histories', p. 259; Murray, 'Chronology', pp. 170-171.

[132] Hist. 7.12-13.

[133] Hist. 8.1, '... *quem iam Chlothacharium vocitabant.*'

[134] On the giving of royal names amongst the Merovingians, see Ewig, 'Namengebung'; and Henry Bosley Woolf, *The Old Germanic Principles of Name-giving* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1939). On the relationship between Chlothar's baptism and the question of legitimacy, see Joseph Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 40-41; and Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 229-270.

[135] On the relationship between baptism and the giving of a name, see Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 238-242; Michael Bennett, 'Spiritual Kinship and the Baptismal Name in Traditional European Society', in *Principalities, Powers and Estates: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Government and Society*, ed. by L. O. Frappell (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1979), pp. 1-13; Karl Werner, 'Liens et parenté et noms de personne: Un problème historique et méthodologique', in *Famille et parenté dans l'occident médiéval* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1977), pp. 13-34 (at pp. 13-18, 25-34); and Pierre de Puniet, 'La liturgie baptismale en Gaule avant Charlemagne', in *Revue des questions liturgique*, 28 (1902), 383-420.

Clovis himself had taken the name Sicamber at his baptism, which called to mind Merovingian antiquity.[136] Also, when Gregory referred to one of Chilperic's unbaptised sons, he used the biblical name Samson, rather than a Merovingian name.[137] Gregory's use of *iam*, therefore, called attention to the irregularity by which the Neustrians had appropriated a naming custom normally associated with baptism and utilised it for immediate political benefit.[138] When Chlothar's baptism finally took place, in 591, King Guntram confirmed his desire to see the child referred to by the name of Chlothar, thus officially bestowing the Merovingian name upon the boy in its proper liturgical context.[139]

Gregory may also have laced his account of Chlothar's baptism with a measure of sarcasm, when he recorded Guntram's reply to Fredegund accepting her request that he act as the child's godfather: 'It is no degradation to our *gens* if I lift this child up [from the baptismal font] – for, if masters take up their own slaves from the sacred font, then why should it be illicit for me to uphold one of my own kin, and to make him my spiritual son through the grace of baptism?'[140] The reply is especially ironic, considering Guntram's own doubts about the child's paternity, which Gregory claimed

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[136] Hist. 2.29, 2.31, 6.27. On the name Sicamber and its relationship with the Merovingian past, see Gerberding, *Rise*, pp. 12-22; Wallace-Hadrill, 'Long', p. 172; Alexandre Eckhardt, 'Sicambria, capitale légendaire des Français en Hongrie ', *Revue des études hongroises*, 6 (1928), 166-197 and Kurth, *Histoire*, pp. 525-526.

[137] Hist. 5.22. The biblical name Samson may have seemed a fitting way to refer to a child, who had not yet received his Merovingian name, since the hero of Judges had been divinely enjoined not to cut his hair, a practice reminiscent of the Merovingian use of long hair to symbolise rulership. On the biblical parallel, see Ewig, 'Namengebung', p. 28. On the view that Samson, instead, had derived his name from the British saint and pilgrim to Brittany, see Woolf, *Old*, pp. 194-195; and Le Jan, *Famille*, pp. 189-190. On Samson's status prior to his baptism, see Jussen, *Patenschaft,* pp. 204-206.

[138] The name Chlothar was itself significant, as it had been borne by Chlothar I, the father of both Chilperic and Guntram, and the most powerful Merovingian in living memory. See Schneider, *Königswahl*, p. 115.

[139] Hist. 10.28. Fredegar, whose version of the *Historiae* lacked this passage, assumed that Chlothar had been baptised in 584, when he had been given his Merovingian name (Fredegar 4.3). On the political significance of Guntram lifting Chlothar II from the font, and thus becoming the child's godfather, see Lynch, *Godparents*, pp. 161-204. This passage, which occurs so near to the end of the *Historiae*, was seen as a kind of happy ending by Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 56-59. See also the similar interpretation of Reydellet, *Royauté*, p. 327. Against this interpretation, see Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 185.

[140] Hist. 10.28, '*Non est enim humilitas genti nostrae, si hic a me excipiatur. Si enim domini proprios famulos de sacro fonte suscipiunt, cur et mihi non liceat propinquum parentem excipere ac filium facere per baptismi gratiam spiritalem?*' Guntram's acceptance is discussed in Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 251-254; Grahn-Hoek, *Fränkische*, pp. 229-231; and Schneider, *Königswahl*, pp. 126-127.

the king had earlier in the *Historiae*. In this passage, Guntram openly questioned Chlothar's paternity before an assembly in Paris, causing Fredegund to gather three hundred noblemen and three bishops, who swore an oath of compurgation that assuaged Guntram of his doubts.[141] This is perhaps the closest Gregory came to calling Fredegund an adulteress, expressing the accusation in the form of reported speech.[142] He also raised questions about the queen's sexual mores when he wrote that she had attempted to seduce Eberulf, the Neustrian *cobicularius*, only to enter into a feud with the official after he rejected her advances.[143] Gregory was clear that this had occurred after Chilperic's death (*post mortem regis*), but the charge of fornication was not very far from that of adultery.[144] The same innuendo seems to have been at work in a rather odd passage, where Gregory described at banquet in which Fredegund asked Guntram's permission to leave dinner early, because she was pregnant, which came as a surprise to the king. Gregory then added that Guntram was amazed to hear this, since he knew that she had given birth to Chlothar just four months previously.[145] Strangely, Gregory never mentioned this unborn child again, inspiring Karl Eckhardt to speculate that this second child actually served as a replacement for Chlothar, whom he imagined had died shortly after his birth, which in turn gave rise to the doubts about the paternity of this replacement heir.[146] Although one might hesitate to accept Eckhardt's creative solution, he was undoubtedly right to see this passage as a problem, one that Gregory may well have left unresolved intentionally, leaving his

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[141] Hist. 8.9. On this passage, see Jussen, *Patenschaft*, pp. 79-82. Gregory may have used the number three hundred because of its symbolic significance. Judas Iscariot had wanted to sell some expensive ointment for three hundred *denarii*, which he then planned to steal from the apostles' moneybag (Mark 14:5, John 12:5-6). On the other hand, the number had positive connotations, since the Greek numeral of that value, τ (tau), was also seen as representing the cross. See Vincent Hooper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 75-76. Brunhild had been able to prove her innocence in Guntram's eyes by giving her word alone, when he had suspected her of instigating an attack on part of his kingdom (Hist. 9.32).

[142] The author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, who was not restricted by such political considerations, flatly labelled Fredegund an adulteress, although he did not question Chlothar II's legitimacy. See LHF 35; with Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 164.

[143] Hist. 7.21.

[144] Wood, 'Secret', p. 258-259.

[145] Hist. 7.7. On this passage, see Shanzer, 'History', p. 397, n. 13.

[146] Eckhardt, *Studia*, pp. 235-239.

audience to wonder about the conception that resulted in this otherwise unknown pregnancy, and the proximity between it and Chilperic's death.[147]

In all likelihood, the caution that Gregory observed in subtly raising the accusation of adultery against Fredegund resulted from his desire to avoid the wrath of King Chilperic, and, subsequently, King Guntram, rather than out of any fear of the queen herself. Although not without influence during her husband's lifetime, Fredegund had probably enjoyed far less prominence at court than Brunhild had in Austrasia, for example, since she was lowborn, without the same sort of resources and kinship ties, and since her husband had shown a willingness to dispense with his wives, including Fredegund herself, whom he later remarried.[148] After Chilperic's death, Fredegund found protection from King Guntram, who adopted her son, and who refused to hand her over to the Austrasians, who wanted to put her on trial for a litany of crimes.[149] Nonetheless, Guntram had also returned many individuals to power in Neustria who had been disenfranchised during Chilperic's reign, and he sent Fredegund away to a villa in Rueil, where, according to Gregory, 'she was exceedingly melancholy, because much of her power had been taken from her.'[150] This is not to suggest that Fredegund was without influence, but she had to act in a manner that was either in keeping with Guntram's wishes, or that was clandestine, so as not to draw his wrath. For example, when Fredegund arranged the assassination of Eberulf, the Neustrian *cobicularius*, she orchestrated the death of an official whom Guntram had threatened to blot out to the ninth generation.[151] And, when Fredegund wished to circumvent a campaign launched by Guntram against Brittany, she sent the Saxons of Bayeux to reinforce the Breton army, because they would be able to disguise themselves and appear as Bretons in the eyes of the Merovingian force.[152]

Of course this sort of activity, even if clandestine, still represents a form of political agency, and Fredegund proved herself capable of striking a bishop when she had Praetextatus murdered. Fredegund came under a great deal of pressure after the

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[147] See Wood, 'Secret', p. 259. The ambiguous and possibly scandalous nature of Fredegund's announcement of her pregnancy was observed by Martínez Pizarro, *Rhetoric*, p. 69.
[148] Hist. 4.28.
[149] Hist. 7.4, 7.5, 7.9, 7.10.
[150] Hist. 7.5, 7.14, 7.19, 7.20, '...cum esset valde maesta, quod ei potestas ex parte fuisset ablata.'
[151] Hist. 7.21.
[152] Hist. 10.9.

bishop's assassination, however, and she was only able to avoid significant repercussions by denying any involvement, by murdering a local nobleman who was asking uncomfortable questions, and by offering a slave as a scapegoat.[153] Moreover, Fredegund was then living in Praetextatus's see of Rouen, and so her activity in this instance represents a very localised form of influence.[154] It is difficult to believe that Fredegund could have been able to pull off the same feat in Tours, which lay far from her sphere of influence, and outside of Neustria altogether. On the few occasions when Fredegund attempted to send assassins into Austrasia, she saved her resources for the more significant targets of Brunhild and Childebert, though she was never close to success in any of these hopeless missions. One need not hold, of course, that Gregory wrote his account of Fredegund without any risk whatsoever, but merely that the level of danger he faced was outmatched by his own personal disdain for the queen. Besides the general dislike he surely felt for someone who acted in a manner totally at odds with his own sense of morality, Gregory also had more personal reasons to loathe the queen. For example, when Merovech took refuge in St. Martin's church in Tours in 576, Fredegund attempted to violate the sanctuary of a shrine entrusted to Gregory's care by having the wayward prince assassinated.[155] Fredegund later succeeded in this act of religious desecration, when she murdered Eberulf while he was taking sanctuary in the *atrium* of St. Martin's church.[156] Although Gregory did not describe Eberulf positively in the *Histories*, he was the man's *compater*, and as such his murder was nothing less than Fredegund killing one of his spiritual kin.[157] Fredegund had also mistreated one of Gregory's in-laws, when she imprisoned his niece's husband, Nicetius, for seven months without just cause. This is not to mention Fredegund's assassination of Praetextatus and Sigibert, or her attempts on Brunhild. Thus, Gregory's contempt for Fredegund likely outweighed any fear he may have felt regarding her reprisals, especially after she had been sent away to Rueil, stripped of most of her power.

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[153] Hist. 8.31, 8.41.
[154] Hist. 7.16.
[155] Hist. 5.14.
[156] Hist. 7.29. On the murder, see Goffart, 'Conspicuously', p. 372 and n. 20.
[157] Hist. 7.21, 7.22, 7.29.

Conclusion

As a bishop, Gregory was not only a spiritual expert, a learned scholar, and a devoted pastor, but he was also necessarily a politician. Unsurprisingly, his relationships with the various rulers of Gaul influenced what he wrote in his *Historiae*, as well as what he omitted from it. Gregory had to tread carefully when discussing certain subjects, such as the paternity of Chlothar II, and he made sure to call Fredegund's fidelity into question only very subtlety, in a way that afforded him the luxury of deniability. Gregory was also hindered by his own set of loyalties, especially those to the Austrasian court, and Brunhild's prominence there clearly inspired him to downplay her involvement in politically sensitive events, such as Merovech's failed rebellion. These influences reached into a number of passages, including those concerning certain Austrasian officials who later fell from grace, which were not ostensibly about either queen. Brunhild and Fredegund, therefore, must be included in the list of Merovingian rulers who left their mark on the *Historiae*, which includes the likes of the kings Sigibert, Chilperic, Guntram, and Childebert. In spite of these constraints, however, Gregory was not beholden to the political forces of his day, since he was able to draw upon an impressive array of literary techniques in order to overcome his restrictions and produce a work with moral and political currency for his Gallic audience. At a time when more than one of his fellow bishops had been incriminated by their own private epistolary correspondence, Gregory endeavoured to record contemporary events in a work of history – something which no one had attempted to do in the previous century and a half prior to him taking up the pen.[158] The fact that he took the entirety of his episcopate to complete the work, and that he subjected it to a process of revision, only emphasises these points, highlighting the complexity with which the *Historiae* must be approached in order to arrive at an evaluation of its contents.

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[158] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 118; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 165-166; Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', p. 55; Reginald Poole, *Chronicles and Annals: A Brief Outline of their Origin and Growth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 8; François-Louis Ganshof, 'L'Historiographie dans la monarchie franque pour les mérovingiens et les carolingiens', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo*, 17 (1970), 631-750 (at 632-642).

V

SANCTITY, CHASTITY, AND FEMININITY

The most fundamental purpose of Gregory's works, beyond their political, polemic, and personal themes, was to communicate, through examples of moral and immoral behaviour, that entry into eternal paradise was awarded only to those who lived a righteous life in the eyes of God. The path to sanctity was largely the same for men and women, but on a few occasions Gregory emphasised that each gender had certain inherent differences that required more specific pastoral guidance. Regarding women in particular, Gregory thought that a life of devotion required steadfastness against adversity, which was a characteristically masculine trait, and so members of the lesser sex (*inferior sexus*) needed to adopt a degree of virility in their quest for sanctity. He did not, however, go as far as some Late Antique theologians had, who argued that it was necessary for righteous women to exchange their femininity for masculinity, since the process of becoming holy involved simultaneously becoming male. To the contrary, Gregory actually provided an interpretation of salvation based on the female images of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother Church, and, curiously, the Queen of Sheba, in one of the few passages in his works that indulged in theological abstraction. In this way, Gregory endowed femininity with a metaphysical significance, thus acknowledging that women did not need to renounce their gender in order to enter heaven. In this way, Gregory does not fit into two scholarly categories applied to Late Antique thought on gender and sanctification: the notion that a holy woman was a virago, i.e. one who acts as a man, and the notion that those who adopted chastity in pursuit of spiritual perfection were regarded as members of a third gender, reflecting on earth the genderless nature of heaven. Instead, Gregory's interpretation of gender (and femininity in particular) indicates that these two categories cannot be taken as representative of all Late Antique and Early Medieval churchmen. Indeed, Gregory's perspective may even challenge the applicability of a sharp theoretical distinction between socially constructed concepts of gender and biological distinctions of sex, not only in regards to his works, but more generally regarding the attitudes prevalent in sixth-century Gaul.

Chastity and a Third Gender

In an article published in 2002, Jo Ann McNamara interpreted Gregory's approach to gender in a manner that had already proved useful in understanding the works of other Late Antique sources, when she suggested that the Bishop of Tours had viewed the chaste as constituting a third gender, neither male nor female.[1] McNamara began her hypothesis by claiming that Gregory treated the sexually active and the chaste in opposite ways. In her estimation, sexually active men and women appeared in Gregory's works as 'violent and murderous, their utter self-indulgence most dramatically depicted by sexual incontinence.'[2] Conversely, the chaste, 'shared the classical virtue of self-control and the Christian virtue of self-abnegation.'[3] Thus, in McNamara's view, Gregory constructed his interpretation of gender based more on sexual behaviour than on biological characteristics: the chaste formed a third gender, distinct from males and females, which were two categories of gender reserved for the sexually active.[4] Although McNamara was clearly on solid ground in holding that categories of gender are constructed, and that a bivalent model of male/female is simply one such interpretation, her argument that Gregory employed a tripartite model of gender is less than convincing. Instead, it seems that Gregory divided people into only two genders, male and female, regardless of whether or not they were sexually active, and that he assumed this had a straightforward relationship with biological differences, which he saw as fitting an equally bivalent categorisation of man and woman.

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[1] Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours', in *GoT*, pp. 199-210; see also id., *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 4-5. The word 'chaste' is here used to refer to those who abstain from all sexual activity, a definition discussed further below. On the concept of a third gender, see Jacqueline Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. by Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 34-51; Lisa Bitel, 'Convent Ruins and Christian Profession: Toward a Methodology of the History of Religion and Gender', in ibid., pp. 1-15; Gilbert Herdt, 'Introduction: Third Sex and Third Gender', in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. by id. (New York: Zone Books, 1996), pp. 21-81; Nancy Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. by id. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1993), pp. 117-141; and Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 170-172.

[2] McNamara, 'Chastity', pp. 200-201.

[3] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 204.

[4] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 200.

Although McNamara held that Gregory employed three categories of gender – male, female, and chaste – the more fundamental element of her hypothesis was the claim that, in Gregory's works, a bivalent distinction between the righteous and the wicked corresponded to a similar distinction between the sexually active and the chaste, writing: 'The distinction between the sexually active and the sexually abstinent... forms an implicit complement to [Gregory's] division of the world between the wicked and the righteous.'[5] Thus the category of 'righteous chaste' stood in opposition to 'wicked incontinent', with the genders male and female serving as subcategories of the latter. 'Male' and 'female', in other words, referred simply to the ways in which the sexually active related, while 'chaste' referred to those individuals who opted out of such relations altogether. One consequence of this interpretation is that it is no longer possible to study Gregory's views on how male and female gender norms impacted his account of relations between the chaste and the unchaste. For example, one could not apply to Gregory's works the methodology employed by Janet Nelson in her study on early medieval royal courts, where she observed that celibate women lived out their religious calling at court 'through specifically female forms of nurturing and networking.'[6] This is because, in Nelson's analysis, these chaste nuns defined their relationship with other members of the court by drawing upon concepts of femininity, in a manner similar to that used by queens and other royal women. As will be shown below, Gregory also assumed that the male and female gender norms defined relationships between chaste men and women, and so any methodology prohibiting an analysis along these lines is ultimately unhelpful.

Although there is certainly a relationship between sexual licentiousness and wicked behaviour in Gregory's works, the matter is not so straightforward as to allow for a direct correspondence of 'righteous-chaste' and 'wicked-unchaste', since he occasionally mentioned sexually active individuals who were well on their way to sanctity, as well as chaste individuals who undertook nefarious activities. For example, Gregory described the despicable actions of two nuns, Chlothild and Basina, who led a

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[5] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 201. On Gregory's desire to present 'the life of the blessed among the disaster of the worthless' in his *Historiae*, see Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 172-174.
[6] Janet Nelson, 'Gendering Courts in the Early Medieval West', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, ed. by Leslie Brubaker and Julia Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 185-197 (at pp. 188-192).

revolt against their abbess, Leubovera, which ultimately led to the sacking of the monastery of Sainte-Croix, the desecration of the relics of the True Cross, and the abuse of Gregory's niece, Justina, who was one of the nuns in the institution.[7] In Gregory's account, there is no reason to believe that Chlothild and Basina violated their vow of chastity, even as they disregarded the rule of enclosure. Indeed, although Gregory wrote that some of the rebellious nuns had married 'evil men' after they had left the monastery, he did not include Chlothild and Basina among these. Gregory even mentioned that Basina had refused her father's offer to marry her into the Visigothic nobility, after she had become a nun at Sainte-Croix.[8] Thus, McNamara's statement that these nuns became violent as they became unchaste is an oversimplification, since Gregory never slighted the chastity of the ringleaders, even when they ordered a band of thugs to assault the convent and set up assassins around the captured abbess with orders to kill should she attempt to escape.[9]

Similarly, one can observe that Gregory assumed the norms governing male and female relationships applied within a chaste context by attending to his account of the trial of Chlothild and Basina, following the failure of their revolt. The rebellious nuns sought to justify their disobedience by accusing their abbess of various offences, the most sensational of which was that she had kept a man as her close associate in the convent, 'who dressed in womanly vestments and was held to be female'.[10] Dramatically, Chlothild then pointed the man out, who was in attendance and, true to form, was wearing women's clothing. The man denied that he had ever even spoken with Leubovera, and he claimed that he dressed in *vestimenta muliebria* (presumably a nun's habit) because he was 'unable to perform manly work'.[11] Although one might imagine that the question of sexual misconduct had been raised, the accusation seems to have been more intended to demonstrate that Leubovera had violated Caesarius's *Regula ad virgines*, which was used in the monastery, and which forbade men from entering the cloister. Gregory felt no need to explain the shocking nature of this charge, as one would expect if he had understood the chaste as belonging to a third gender,

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[7] Hist. 9.39-43, 10.15-17.
[8] Hist. 6.34.
[9] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 206.
[10] Hist. 10.15, *'qui indutus vestimenta muliebria pro feminia haberetur.'*
[11] Hist. 10.15, *'nihil opus posse virile agere.'*

neither male nor female, in which case a man dressed in a woman's clothing in a nunnery would presumably have been uncontroversial.[12]

The same presumption of shock is also present in Gregory's account of Chlothild's next accusation, when she pointed out that her abbess had castrated a man, and subsequently kept him in the monastery. 'Just what sort of holiness dwells in this abbess,' Chlothild asked, 'who makes men eunuchs, and keeps them in her presence as per imperial custom?'[13] A physician named Reovalis then defended the abbess by explaining that he had castrated the man in question, but that he had done so because the man had a disease of the groin, and that Leubovera had had nothing to do with the operation, which had been ordered by the foundress of the institution, the saintly Radegund herself.[14] Chlothild may have raised the accusation in order to implicate Leubovera in a criminal act, since castration was prohibited in a number of legal texts,

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[12] McNamara's only comment on this passage was the suggestion that perhaps the man had donned female attire in order to escape some obligation to engage in violent revenge, the 'manliest of all activities'; see McNamara, 'Chastity', pp. 202-203. There is no explicit support for this within the text.

[13] Hist. 10.15, 'Quae enim santitas in hac abbatissa versatur, quae viros eunuchus facit et secum habitare imperiali ordine praecepit?' Because the mention of this eunuch followed immediately after Chlothild's reference to the man who was unable to do manly work, there has been some confusion in the secondary literature that has mistakenly regarded the two men as the same person, e.g. Vern Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages', in Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. by Clare Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 31-46 (at p. 34). That these are two distinct people is clear in the following way. Leubovera was acquitted on the first charge (regarding the man unable to do manly work), by establishing that she had never seen the man or heard of him, and that he lived over forty miles from Poitiers. After Chlothild thus failed to get Leubovera on this charge (igitur abbatissa de isto crimine non convincens...), the rebellious nun then raised the issue of Leubovera keeping a eunuch in her presence (eunuchus... secum habitare...), which could not apply to someone who had just been proved never to have come into contact with the abbess. Leubovera was then acquitted a second time (sed cum nec de hac re abbatissam potuissit culpabilis repperiri...), after which Chlothild raised even more charges that Gregory did not bother to detail. Moreover, the second accusation was, specifically, that Leubovera made men eunuchs and kept them in her presence imperiali ordine, that is, in accordance with the practice of empresses at the Byzantine court. Imperial eunuchs were not disguised in female clothing, and it would have made little sense to accuse the abbess of mimicking imperial pomp if she had kept the man's identity secret.

[14] This Reovalis may have been the man of the same name who travelled to the East in search of relics on Radegund's behalf, since he claimed to have learned the procedure while on an expedition to the East, see Baudonivia, De vita sanctae Radegundis 14. On the use of Byzantine medical procedures in the West, Gerhard Baader, 'Early Medieval Latin Adaptations of Byzantine Medicine in Western Europe', Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 38 (1984), 251-259; and id., 'Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und ärtzlicher Stand im frühen und hohen Mittelalter', Medizinhistorisches Journal, 14 (1979), 176-185. For the medical treatment of ambiguous sexuality, see Cadden, Meanings, pp. 202-218.

and she apparently also wished to accuse the abbess of imitating the pomp of the Byzantine court, where eunuchs were kept, in a manner unbecoming of a coenobitic institution.[15] The question of gender also seems relevant to Chlothild's charge, since she clearly thought that a castrated man had no place in a convent, a point which Reovalis's defence apparently conceded. Although Gregory did not make his own understanding of eunuchs explicit, his presumption that the presence of a eunuch in a convent was scandalous seems inconsistent with the idea that he saw the chaste as belonging to a third gender, neither male nor female.[16]

Gregory actually seems to have had a complex view of chastity, one that meant more than simply sexual abstinence. For example, he wrote that Helarius, a senator from Dijon, was married and had fathered several sons, but that he managed his

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[15] *Pactus legis Salicae*, 29.17 (although 25.5 and 40.11 list castration as a punishment for certain offences); *Lex Ribuaria*, 6.28(27); and *Decretus Childeberto rege*, ed. by Karl Eckhardt, *MGH Leges*, 4.1 *Pactus legis Salicae, Capitula legi Salicae addita* (Hannover, 1962), 5.5. On the use of eunuchs in the Byzantine court, see Shaun Tougher, 'In or Out? Origins of Court Eunuchs', *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. by id. (London: Duckworth, 2002), pp. 143-159; Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 107-109; Kathryn Ringrose, 'Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium', in *Third Sex*, pp. 85-110 (at pp. 94-98); Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 172-196; Radolphe Guillard, 'Études de titulaire byzantine les titres auliques réservés aux eunuques', *Revue des études byzantines*, 14 (1956), 122-125; id., 'Les eunuques dans l'empire byzantin: Étude de titulature et de prosopographie byzantines', *Études byzantines*, 1 (1943), 197-238; and Peter Browe, *Zur Geschichte der Entmannung. Eine religions- und rechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Breslau: Miller und Seiffert, 1936).

[16] Opinions on eunuchs varied: they were often seen as either unnaturally degendered beings, or simply as women, although some saw them merely as mutilated men. See Vern Bullough, 'Eunuchs in History and Society', in *Eunuchs in Antiquity*, pp. 1-18; Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); ead., 'Reconfiguring the Prophet Daniel: Gender, Sanctity, and Castration in Byzantium', in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Shaun Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minneaoplis Press, 2003), pp. 73-106; ead., 'Living'; ead., 'Passing the Test of Sanctity: Denial of Sexuality and Involuntary Castration', in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Shaun Tougher, 'Social Transformation, Gender Transformation? The Court Eunuch, 300-900', in *Gender in the Early Medieval World*, pp. 70-82 (at pp. 81-82); id., 'Holy Eunuchs! Masculinity and Eunuch Saints in Byzantium', in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by H. Cullum and Katherine Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 93-108; id., 'In or Out'; id., 'Images of Effeminate Men: The Case of Byzantine Eunuchs', in *Masculinity and Medieval Europe*, ed. by Dawn Hadley (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 89-100; 'Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin', in *Women, Men, Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 168-184; and Matthew Kuefler, 'Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern Bullough and James Brandage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 279-306.

household with such chastity (*castitas*) and purity of soul (*puritas amini*) that no one presumed to practice adultery (*adulterium*) there.[17] Gregory, therefore, was able to characterise someone who was sexually active, and bound within the male/female gendered relations of marriage and family, as exemplary in his 'potent chastity' (*pollens castitas*). Gregory's addition of a biblical quote at the end of his passage on Hilarius, 'let marriage be honourable and the marriage bed pure', supports this point, since the verse (Hebrews 13:4) appears in a context that envisions a married couple engaging in sexual conduct within certain boundaries, rather than one maintaining strict sexual abstinence.[18] This example calls into question McNamara's view that Gregory saw the righteous and the sexually active as belonging to two opposite categories, and that he saw the chaste as neither male nor female. It also challenges McNamara's view that Gregory had a negative view of marriage in general, which she expressed by writing that, although Gregory knew of 'sober conjugal pairs united in fulfilling the divine plan through procreation, none of them show up in his literary works.'[19] However, in Gregory's *vita* of his great-grandfather and namesake, Bishop Gregory of Langres, he wrote that the saint had slept with his wife 'only for the sake of begetting offspring', and that he had never been attracted to any other woman.[20] Gregory added that God had blessed their marriage with sons, and one may safely assume that he was grateful that his family's principal ancestor had been both holy and sexually active.[21] Moreover, in regarding children as a divine gift that resulted from marriage between worthy spouses, Gregory was following biblical precedents.[22]

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[17] GC 41.

[18] GC 41, '*honorabile conibium et thorus immaculatus...*'

[19] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 201.

[20] VP 7.1, '*quam ad propagandam generationem tantum dicitur cognovisse...*' In sixth-century Gaul, married men were permitted to become bishops, as long as their wives approved, and as long as they remained chaste following their consecration, see Elliot, *Spiritual*, pp. 86-91; and Brian Brennan, 'Episcopae: Bishops' Wives Viewed in Sixth Century Gaul', *Church History*, 54 (1985), 311-323.

[21] On the importance of Gregory of Langres for Gregory of Tours and his family, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 17-18. On the view that procreation was integral to marriage, see James Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 579-582. On the issues of chastity and procreation within marriage, see Clarke, *This Female*, pp. 121-138.

[22] Among the examples, most prominent is perhaps 1 Samuel 1:11-28 (Elkanah and Hannah) and its parallels with Luke 1:5-25 (Zechariah and Elizabeth). Other Old Testament passages include Genesis 21:1-2 (Sarah and Abraham), Genesis 29:31 (Leah), Genesis 30:22 (Rachel), and Judges 13:2-24 (Manoah's wife).

It is unclear whether or not Gregory's biblical framework of thought also included Galatians 3.28, which has featured prominently in scholarship on the subject of gender in Late Antiquity, since it stated that, for those who had been baptised in Christ, 'there is neither male nor female' (*non est masculus, neque femina*). There is a hint of this in his description of a vision of heaven that Salvius of Albi had experienced, where he wrote that Salvius had been taken through gates of light, only to see a limitless space that contained 'a multitude of indeterminate sex' (*multitudo promiscui sexus*). Although Gregory gave no further clarification about these beings, he also wrote that Salvius had seen men – specifically males – in priestly and secular apparel (*viri in veste sacerdotali ac saeculari*), when he got close enough to meet some martyrs and confessors, and so it is difficult to conclude anything from this vision concerning gender in the afterlife.[23] Gregory never quoted Galatians 3.28, and he declined to discuss the issue more specifically, which is not surprising given his general reluctance to engage in theological discourse or to raise abstract questions.

Whatever Gregory's views about the afterlife, he clearly thought that males and females, bound in marriage for the sake of procreation, were able to attain sanctification. Of course, Gregory naturally valued sexual abstinence, and there is every reason to believe that he incorporated this virtue into his own life. He also looked favourably on abstinence within marriage, such as when he described a young couple that had taken mutual vows of continence on their wedding night, since the girl had been married by her parents against her own wishes to remain a virgin.[24] This, however, did not prevent Gregory from praising certain sexually active couples. Furthermore, when a woman named Berthegund left her husband and came to Tours, wishing to enter a monastery because she thought that those bound in wedlock were excluded from heaven, Gregory took the opportunity to correct her soteriology and to send her back to her husband.[25] Indeed, Gregory presented her justification – that her marriage had been conducted without parental consent – as a feeble excuse, since she

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[23] Hist. 7.1.

[24] Hist. 1.47; GC 31.

[25] Hist. 9.33. On the legalities of women leaving their husbands in the Merovingian kingdoms, see Wemple, *Women*, pp. 42-43, 132-133. Gregory claimed that he read the relevant canons of the Council of Nicaea to Berthegund, but a precise identification of the canonical decrees he had in mind has proved elusive. McNamara suggested, very plausibly, that he had actually referred to the canons of the Council of Gangra (c. 343); see McNamara, *Sisters*, p. 110. On Berthegund's troubles in Tours, see Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 101-102.

had been married for thirty years, even though forced marriages were canonically invalid regardless of their duration. In other words, Gregory could have allowed Berthegund to enter into the monastery, if he had thought that marital life was truly contemptible. [26] Therefore, Gregory's interpretation of morality cannot be straightjacketed into a bivalent division between 'righteous chaste' and 'wicked incontinent', and there is no basis for the suggestion that he viewed the chaste as belonging to a third gender.

Monegund and the Virago

According to a different interpretation found in some Late Antique sources, holiness was seen as something inherently associated with masculinity. Thus, rather than transcending beyond the gendered relations of male/female, the processes of sanctification involved becoming masculine. For women this meant transgressing the boundaries of their female gender and becoming what has been termed a virago, while for men it required simply the assertion of qualities they were already expected to possess. This view was expressed by Jerome, when he wrote, 'as long as a woman is bound to childbirth and children, she is as different from a man as body is from soul; but if she should desire to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man – for we all wish to progress toward the perfect man.'[27] Ambrose likewise wrote that, although the unbelieving woman deserved to be termed according to her bodily sex (*corporeus sexus*), the believing woman lacked this worldly label (*carens iam nomine saeculi corporis sexu*).[28] Several studies of Late Antiquity have demonstrated the importance of this view for understanding the rise of asceticism in Christianity, although it remains unclear how widely the idea of the virago was held, since passages such as those found in Jerome and Ambrose are not especially

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[26] Orléans I, 2. See also Hen, *Culture*, pp. 125-127; and Arjava, *Woman*, pp. 40-41.

[27] Jerome, *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios libri tres*, PL, 26, 3.5: '*Quamdiu mulier partui servit et liberis, hanc habet ad virum differentiam, quam corpus ad animam. Sin autem Christo magis voluerit servire quam saeculo, mulier esse cessabit, et dicetur vir, quia omnes in perfectum virum cupimus occurrere.*'

[28] Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam libris X comprehensa*, PL, 15, 10.161. On both passages, see Murray, 'One', pp. 41-43; Schulenburg, *Forgetful*, p. 453, n. 6; and Vern Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York: Wiley, 1976), p. 365.

common.[29] For example, although the idea of the virago seems to play a central role in the third-century *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, where, on the eve of her martyrdom, Perpetua experienced a vision in which her clothing was removed and she realised that she had become male (*facta sum masculus*), it is not clear how widespread or long-lasting Perpetua's cult was, and there is no evidence that she was venerated in the liturgy in Gaul.[30] Gregory made no mention of her, and while he may have drawn some inspiration from the idea of the virago, and he did not go as far as either Jerome or Ambrose, even if he did think that certain inherently masculine attributes were beneficial in the struggle for sanctity. Neither did he follow his contemporary, Fortunatus, who had echoed Ambrose when he observed the advantages of chastity by describing intercourse, childbirth, and breastfeeding as sources of pain and discomfort for women.[31] Instead, Gregory regarded femininity as something that had an essential place in understanding salvation.

Gregory expressed these thoughts most clearly in the preface to his brief *vita* on Monegund, which appears as the penultimate *vita* in his collection of twenty short narratives on the lives of particular saints contained with his *Liber vitae partum*. As the title implies, with the exception of Monegund each of these *vitae* concern holy men, and Gregory addressed the discrepancy by emphasising that, lest his audience think otherwise, women were also able to serve as examples of holiness: '[God] provides us with exemplars, not only of men, but also of the inferior sex (*inferior sexus*), who strive not timidly (*segniter*) but heroically (*viriliter*); he not only imparts the kingdom of heaven unto men, who fight as they should, but also unto the women who sweat in these battles and win the field.'[32] This is the closest Gregory came to articulating something like the idea of the virago, especially in his use of the adverb *viriliter*, with

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[29] Elm, *Virgins*, pp. 266-271; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 32-34; Clarke, *This Female*, pp. 214-216; Dunn, *Emergence*, pp. 43-45; and Kerstin Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Gotab, 1990), pp. 93-139.

[30] *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, 10. On the translation as 'made male', see Rachel Moriarty, 'Playing the Man: The Courage of Christian Martyrs: Translated and Transposed', in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. by R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Boydell, 1989), pp. 1-11 (at p. 9). Jonathan Conant, 'Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350-900: An Essay in Mediterranean Communities', *Speculum*, 85 (2010), 1-46 (at 21-23).

[31] Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 8.3; see Wemple, *Women*, p. 151 and n. 4.

[32] VP 19 preface, '[Deus] nobisque non modo viros, sed etiam ipsum inferiorem sexum, non segniter, sed viriliter agonizantem, praebet exemplum. Qui non solum viris legitime decertantibus, verum etiam feminis in his proeliis faborabiliter desudantibus siderea regna participat.'

its etymological derivation from the word for a man (i.e. a male), *vir*. However, his use of *viriliter* was not intended to suggest that Monegund had abandoned her femininity, but simply that she had augmented its weaknesses with determination.

Elsewhere in his works, Gregory normally applied the adverb *viriliter* to the actions of men, often in a martial context, when resistance was required in the face of overwhelming odds.[33] By extension, he also used it to refer to the same spirit of resistance in other circumstances, again usually in reference to men.[34] On two occasions, however, Gregory used *viriliter* to describe the behaviour of women: when Brunhild defended her servant Lupus by placing herself between two hostile armies, and when her daughter Ingund resisted the attempts of the Visigothic queen Goiswinth to convert her to Arianism by force.[35] These two examples caution against the view that Gregory connected virility with the ascetic pursuit of sanctity, since neither Brunhild nor Ingund were ascetic, virginal, or consecrated religious. Moreover, Gregory did not use the word *viriliter*, or similarly masculine imagery, in the two passages in his works that parallel Ingund's sufferings closely: when an unnamed virgin resisted the attempts by the Arian king Thrasamund to force her to be rebaptised, and when Chlothild the Younger endured her Arian husband Amalaric's

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[33] Thus, *viriliter* appeared as a description of how Aëtius readied himself to battle Attila (Hist. 2.6), how Chilperic expected his *duces* to resist the onslaught of Guntram and Childebert's combined forces (Hist. 6.41), how Gundovald would have been able to survive a siege if only he had dared (Hist. 7.34), and how Grippo survived a horde of Carthaginian murders (Hist. 10.4). On Gregory's interest in Merovingian virility see Wallace-Hadrill, 'Work', pp. 60-62. On the relationship between masculinity and the ability to struggle against the odds, see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe', *Gender and Christianity*, pp. 53-58 (at pp. 53-58); and Nathalie Delierneux, 'Virilité physique et sainteté féminine dans l'hagiographie orientale du IVe au VIIe siècle', *Byzantion*, 67 (1997), 179-243. Isidore of Seville wrote that the apparent linguistic connection between 'virgin' (*virgo*) and *virago* was fallacious, and that the latter referred instead to a martial spirit, such as that possessed by the Amazons, rather than a commitment to sexual abstinence (*Etymologiae*, 11.2.22).

[34] Thus, Gregory used *viriliter* to describe the manner in which the bishop Brice defended himself against the charge of breaking his vow of chastity (Hist. 2.1), how Anastasius resisted the unjust seizure of his property (Hist. 4.12), how Injuriosus resisted Chlothar I's taxation after his fellow bishops had acquiesced (Hist. 4.2), and how Gregory himself, in a dream, resisted King Guntram's efforts to drag Eberulf from the sanctuary of St. Martin's church in Tours (Hist. 7.22). Likewise, Cato had exhibited this quality when he stayed in a plague ridden town in order to say mass (Hist. 4.31), and Fredegund had instructed her weak-willed assassins to find their nerve and act *virilitate* (Hist. 8.29).

[35] Hist. 5.38, 6.4. See also Heydemann, 'Gestaltung', pp. 76-77.

beatings on account of her faith. [36] Thus, Gregory's application of *vitiliter* to Monegund's pursuit of sanctity probably has as much to do with its literary context, where she appears as the only woman in a collection of *vitae* on heroic saints, than it does with any inherent connection between masculinity and sanctity.

While Gregory emphasised that Monegund possessed the same sort of qualities that had been used by the male saints in the *Liber vitae partum* to gain entry into heaven, he also put this into a distinctly feminine framework, when he mentioned three female images in reference to salvation. First, Gregory wrote that the Saviour of the World, after revealing himself to the patriarchs and prophets, 'deigned, in culmination, to enter into the womb of Mary, ever virgin undefiled.'[37] Next, Gregory wrote that the 'teachings of the Holy Church' (*eclesiae sanctae dogma*) served as a haven for the elect, offering them the 'heavenly remedy' for the ills of the world (*medicina caelestis*). Although not gendered beyond the grammatical gender of *sancta ecclesia*, Gregory elsewhere referred to the Church as a mother – *mater ecclesia* – in order to facilitate a similar comparison to Noah's ark, protecting the righteous from the Deluge.[38] Lastly, Gregory mentioned the Queen of Sheba, who journeyed to Jerusalem in order to hear the wisdom of King Solomon, just has Monegund had come to Tours to visit the shrine of St. Martin. This reference to the Queen of Sheba cited her appearance in the Old Testament, but any mention of her naturally called to mind her more prominent appearance in the Gospels, where Jesus stated that the Queen of the South, who came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom, would rise on the Day of Judgement in order to pass condemnation on a sinful generation.[39] It is

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[36] Hist. 2.2, 3.10. In each passage, a Merovingian woman remained steadfast in her refusal to renounce her faith in the face of Arian persecution. Similarly, each passage endowed the girls with a martyr-like quality by mentioning a loss of blood during their ordeals. Gregory's words in Hist. 2.2, *fluxu ventris aspersit*, however, are admittedly vague on this point, and they have been taken to refer to diarrhoea, rather than blood, by Shanzer, 'History', pp. 408-409. On menstruation and impurity in the Early Middle Ages, see Lutterbach, *Sexualität*, pp. 27-30, 80-96.

[37] VP preface, '*ad extremum semper virginis intactaeque Mariae dignatur utero suscipi.*' Gregory also mentioned Mary's perpetual virginity (and resolved the difficulty presented by Jesus' brothers) in Hist. 1 preface, 1.22; and GM 8.

[38] Hist. 1.4. On the central role that Gregory's ecclesiology played in forming the thematic structure of the *Historiae*, see Heinzelmann, *Gregor*, pp. 136-167.

[39] Matthew 12.42; Luke 11.31. The Queen of Sheba first appears in 1 Kings 10. Gregory also compared queen Ultrogotha's journey to St. Martin's with the Queen of Sheba (VM 1.12). On the comparison, see de Nie, *Views*, pp. 134-137.

tempting to interpret Gregory references to these female images of salvation in his preface to Monegund's *vita* as carrying a deep theological significance, with Mary representing the Incarnation, the Queen of Sheba representing the Eschaton, and the Church representing the journey of the believer between these two pivotal moments in salvation history. Although Gregory did not often engage in theological abstraction, the prefaces in his *Liber vitae patrum* are an exception, since they represent didactic sermons in which the hidden spiritual meaning of the saint's life is explained in an almost exegetical fashion.[40]

Although this interpretation must remain speculative, one can say with more certainty that Gregory's reference to Mary in the preface affirmed that femininity was not at odds with sanctity. This becomes especially evident in light of the manner in which Mary was presented elsewhere in his writings. For example, Gregory wrote that the bishops assembled at the council of Mâcon had admonished one of their colleagues, who expressed a naive uncertainty as to whether the meaning of the Latin word for man, *homo*, included not only males but also females, by pointing out that scripture referred to Jesus as the 'Son of Man' (*filius hominis*), even though he had been born of a woman, Mary, without a biological father.[41] Indeed, Mary's role as the Theotokos, in whom the spiritual and physical words met, found a concrete expression in Gregory's use of her, and particularly her relics, to connect contemporary Gaul to the Holy Land of the Bible, when he mentioned her miracles in Gaul in tandem with similar events in the Near East, or in tandem with biblical figures.[42]

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[40] On the function of the prefaces in Gregory's works, see Brunhölzl, *Geschichte*, pp. 133-137; also Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 88-90.

[41] Hist. 8.20. This event is absent from the canonical promulgations issued by the council that have been preserved independent of Gregory's *Historiae*. The motivation behind the bishop posing this question has been a point of interest, since some have read into the passage the idea that the bishop debated whether or not women had souls. On the issue, see Albert Demyttenaere, 'The Cleric, Women and the Stain: Some Beliefs and Ritual Practices Concerning Women in the Early Middle Ages', in *Frauen in Spätantike*, pp. 141-165 (at pp. 141-146).

[42] Thus, Gregory mentioned a church dedicated to her in Jerusalem, which she had helped to construct by appearing to the architect in a vision in order to tell him how to raise large columns, and he then immediately mentions that she had worked a miracle at an oratory dedicated to her in Marsat, in GM 8. The church in Jerusalem was presumably the one covering her empty tomb in the Valley of Jehoshaphat; see Viellard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, p. 432. Similarly, when a leper went on pilgrimage from Gaul to Jerusalem, he collected Marian relics, which were then protected by the saint when she prevented him from being waylaid by bandits on the return journey (GM 18). In Tours, Mary's relics were kept with those of John the Baptist (GC 19). Gregory's deacon had gone to Palestine, along with other pilgrims (GM 1), and he may

Gregory's preface to his *vita* of Monegund is paradoxical in its reference both to Mary's motherhood of Christ and her perpetual virginity. This parallels his paradoxical description of Monegund as both an exemplary female saint, yet one who drew upon characteristically masculine traits in her struggle for sanctity. It may be possible, therefore, to tentatively agree with the view of John Kitchen, who wrote that '[Monegund's] gender is problematized in [Gregory's] approach to writing about sanctity and requires a rhetorical technique that accommodates what he clearly regards as a natural obstacle to holiness.'[43] That technique, however, was not to eradicate the problem by exchanging Monegund's femininity for masculinity, but to point out that the apparent problem of gender was simply a paradox, one found in the life of the Virgin Mary and, indeed, in the very nature of salvation itself. Indeed, the very fact that Monegund had overcome her *inferior sexus* distinguishes her from the male saints in the *Liber vitae patrum*, since this was a feat that no man had ever even wrestled with.[44] The unresolved tension inherent in the preface served as the key for unlocking the meaning of the subsequent narrative of the *vita*, signalling that Gregory wished his audience to seek the meaning made visible through the contrast, rather than to simply resolve an apparent contradiction.

The narrative of Monegund's *vita* expressed this paradox in its relationship with hagiographic genre. On the one hand, Gregory's narrative kept to the same basic structure that he had used in his accounts of the various male saints in the *Liber vitae partum*, which conforms to hagiographic convention: a conversion from secular life, a series of tests of faith, internal and external, and a demonstration of miracles, before and after death, interrupted by a deathbed scene and a burial.[45] In this way, Gregory emphasised his point that female saints were able to perform the same deeds as their male counterparts, regardless of their *inferior sexus*. On the other hand, there are unusual features in Gregory's narrative that highlight the particularly feminine aspects of Monegund's spiritual path. For example, Gregory characterised Monegund's

have been one of his key sources of information, such as his account of a Jewish convert rescued from a furnace by Mary's intercession (GM 9).

[43] Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, p. 104.

[44] Cf. Elm, *Virgins*, p. 269.

[45] On the general literary schema found in hagiography, see Schulenburg, *Forgetful*, pp. 34-46. John Kitchen observed the similarities between Gregory's *De beata Monegunde* and the other *vitae* within the *Liber vitae patrum*, as well as other hagiographic literature, including accounts of Eastern ascetics, see his *Saints' Lives*, pp. 102-114.

conversion to her ascetic calling as resulting from a mother's grief (*genetrix maesta*), when both of her children died of fever. This is conspicuous, given the tendency in hagiography to admonish mothers for their excessive displays of grief at the loss of a child.[46] Gregory himself expressed a similar attitude when he personally confronted the Abbess Agnes about her excessive display of grief at the death of Radegund, even though he too was struggling to hold back his own tears.[47] Perhaps the closest parallel appears in Gerontius's *Life of Melania the Younger*, written in the fifth century, when Melania become so distraught at deaths of her two children that she and her husband decided to live an ascetic life together.[48] Melania, however, had always wanted to embrace asceticism, but she had been forced into marriage by her parents, and compelled to have children by her husband. Monegund, conversely, had happily conceived her two children, who brought her such tremendous joy (*valde gavisa laetabatur*) that she used to say: 'God has blessed me with fertility so that I might have these two daughters.'[49]

Gregory's narrative is also unusual in its characterisation of Monegund's husband, who attempted to retrieve her from St. Martin's church in Tours, where she had sought to live out her spiritual calling. He was motivated, not because he wanted her to return to the marital bed, but because he wished to return her to a hermitage on the family property, so that he could keep her spiritual power near to him. Typically in hagiography, the spurned partners of female saints endeavour to reclaim holy women out of a desire to reacquire a lost sexual partner, rather than a spiritual powerhouse. Unlike the usual female protagonist, therefore, Monegund was not using asceticism to transcend the social norms expected of women, expressed through marital relations and childbirth. Instead, she had fled her husband's property because she sought to avoid her growing local reputation for thaumaturgy, which threatened her with the sin of pride. This may explain how Gregory was able to praise Monegund for leaving her husband to come to Martin's church, where she founded a monastery and lived out her days in piety and devotion, even though, as mentioned above, he had objected to

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[46] VP 19.1. Schulenburg, *Forgetful*, pp. 34-46.

[47] GC 104. On Gregory's views toward emotional restraint and self-control, see Rosenwein, 'Writing', pp. 29-31.

[48] Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Life of Melania, the Younger: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Mellen, 1984), 1-8.

[49] VP 19.1, '*Propagavit Deus generationem meum, ut mihi duae filiae nascerentur.*'

Berthegund's attempt to leave her husband and become a nun in Tours.[50] Thus, Monegund's decision to embrace the eremitic life, done out of a mother's grief and with the initial consent of her husband, represents an interpretation of asceticism that had little interest in emphasising the renunciation of the female gender as a prerequisite to the acquisition of holiness.

Gregory had his most obvious opportunity to describe the sanctification of a woman as a process of exchanging femininity for masculinity in his account of Papula, who secretly entered into a male religious institution and lived as a monk.[51] Although a broader hagiographic genre used the same plot in order to demonstrate the ascetic ability to overcome the limitations of the female gender, Gregory's account of Papula is remarkable in its disinterest in making such a point.[52] Papula had entered the monastery only because she knew that her parents, who disapproved of her choice to live as an ascetic, would come looking for her in a nunnery.[53] Her decision to live as a 'man amongst men' (*vir inter viros*), therefore, meant merely that she dressed in disguise as a matter of necessity, and Gregory twice emphasised that the monks were 'unaware of her sex' (*ignorantes sexum*), and that 'no one knew what she was' (*a nullo*

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[50] VP 19.2; Hist. 9.33, 10.12. Gregory also looked favourably on Gunthedrud, who left her husband and children in Saint-Quentin and came to St. Martin's to have her blindness cured. After one eye was miraculously healed, she stayed and became a nun in Tours, apparently abandoning her family (VM 2.9).

[51] GC 16.

[52] On the genre, see Giselle de Nie, 'Consciousness Fecund through God: From Male Fighter to Spiritual Bride-Mother in Late Antique Female Sanctity', in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Anneke Moulder-Bakker (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 100-161 (at pp. 123-129); Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex*, pp. 155-166; Susan Harvey, 'Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story', in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. by Lynda Coon et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), pp. 35-59 (at pp. 46-50); Vern Bullough, 'Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook*, pp. 223-242; id., 'Transvestism in the Middle Ages', in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. by id. and James Brundage (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1982), pp. 43-54; Averil Cameron, 'Neither Male nor Female', *Greece and Rome*, 27 (1980), 60-67; Evelyne Patlagean, 'L'Histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance', *Studi Medievali*, 17 (1976), 597-623; John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif', *Viator*, 5 (1974), 1-32; Wayne Meeks, 'The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of Symbol in Earliest Christianity', *History of Religions*, 13 (1973/1974), 165-208; Marie Delcourt, 'Le Complexe de Diane dans l'hagiographie chrétienne', *Revue d'histoire des religions*, 153 (1958), 1-33; and Delehaye, *Légendes*, pp. 59-60, 188-192.

[53] They may not have had to look extensively, considering the paucity of nunneries at the time, see McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, pp. 91-92.

agnita quid esset).[54] Three days before her death, Papula revealed her secret, because she knew that the mortuary preparations would be moment of scandal otherwise. Gregory wrote that her body was subsequently prepared for burial 'by other women' (*ab aliis mulieribus*), in a phrase that necessarily included Papula in the category of 'woman' (*mulier*). Moreover, when Gregory complimented her as a 'servant of God', he used the words *ancillia Dei*, thus employing a term for 'servant' that applied only to females, without a male grammatical counterpart, when other, more flexible terms were readily available, such as *servus, famulus*, etc., which Gregory used regularly. Indeed, the theme of Gregory's passage on Papula was the need to struggle against the worldly obstacles (*impedimentum saeculi*) in the quest for sanctity, and in this context she found refuge from her overbearing parents – not transgression of her gender – inside the monastic enclosure. If Papula had not represented a virago for Gregory, then no other saint in his works, Monegund included, was likely to do so.

Women and Ecclesiastical Authority

One consequence of Gregory's assumption that the concepts of male and female applied even to righteous, chaste individuals is that women, including saints, were expected to acquiesce to male episcopal authority. One subtheme of Monegund's *vita*, for example, was her submission to St. Martin, expressed in passages where she instructed people seeking a cure that she was unworthy, and instead they should seek Martin's intercession.[55] Gregory's emphasis on episcopal authority, vested only in men, suggests that he did not see the sanctification of women as a process of exchanging femininity for masculinity, nor did he see the chaste as forming a third gender. Gregory did include examples, however, when God used a woman to admonish bishops, or other male leaders. These passages acquired their compelling quality from God's ability to use the humble to rebuke those in power, including bishops, who had deviated from the straight path. While Gregory associated episcopal authority with masculinity, he reserved the status of sainthood for both men and women. Therefore,

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[54] For an analysis of the phenomenon that is attentive to the point that 'cross-dressing was for women primarily a practical device', such as a means of running away from one's family, or to go on pilgrimage, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 291.

[55] Coon, *Sacred*, pp. 125-126. On the relationship between the cults of Monegund and Martin, see Prinz, *Frühes*, p. 37.

female saints were still expected to submit to male episcopal authority, except in instances when God himself wished to use gender difference as a sign of his omnipotence.

In several places, Gregory described the female saints in heaven as admonishing bishops through visions or other miracles. The two virgins Maura and Britta, for example, became upset that their veneration had been ignored, and that their tombs had become overgrown.[56] One day the virgins appeared to a man in a vision and ordered him to build a shelter for them over their tombs, and, after initially ignoring the request, he decided to comply once they threatened him with imminent death. The man, however, needed the structure to be consecrated before it could be used as an oratory, so he requested Bishop Eufronius to perform the ritual, only to be turned away. Maura and Britta then appeared to Eufronius and, tearfully, requested the consecration, at which point Eufronius hurried to the oratory, so that he would not carry the guilt of a great sin. In recounting this story, Gregory was describing something that involved him personally, since Eufronius was not only his episcopal predecessor at Tours, but also his close relative.[57] Moreover, canonical regulations stipulated that oratories with relics needed to be supplied with a cleric, approved by the local bishop, who had the duty to chant the psalms.[58] Thus, when Maura and Britta insisted that Eufronius consecrate what had previously been a private place of worship, they were placing a burden not just on Eufronius, but also on his successor, i.e. Gregory himself.[59]

In another example, Gregory mentioned the virgin and martyr Eulalia, who worked a 'great wonder' (*magnum miraculum*) on her annual feast, when she made the sky brighten and the trees in front of her altar bloom dove-shaped blossoms, even though her feast occurred in December.[60] Sometimes, however, the miracle would not occur, and under these circumstances the liturgical procession and the chanting of the psalms that accompanied her feast were cancelled. It was only after Eulalia had been

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[56] GC 18.
[57] Hist. 4.15.
[58] Épaone, 25; and Orleans IV, 7.
[59] Isabel Moreira, 'Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: The Question of Clerical Control', *Catholic Historical Review*, 89.4 (2003), 621-642 (at 624-625, nn. 13-14).
[60] GM 90.

'placated by the tears of the common folk' that she would then make the blossoms appear again, which were then gathered and brought to the bishop of the basilica.[61] Thus, Gregory's account preserved the role of the bishop in organising the liturgical celebrations, but the martyr Eulalia also enjoyed a measure of ecclesiastical oversight, since her feast was only a felicitous occasion when she deigned to work her annual miracle.

The intercessory powers of Eulalia, Maura, and Britta depended on their favoured position in the eyes of God, whose will they were empowered to communicate. They were also deceased, and so their spiritual powers did not fundamentally challenge the authority that bishops had over the living members of their congregations.[62] Furthermore, their cults depended on episcopal sanction, since their *virtus* was expressed through posthumous miracles associated with tombs, relics, or other objects of veneration.[63] Some female saints, however, were able to intervene outside of the site of their official cult, such as when the murdered Ausanius and his wife Papianilla appeared to their killer, Parthenius, in a vision and threatened him with divine judgement, shortly before he died at the hands of an enraged mob. [64] Moreover, Gregory also described holy women who had possessed miraculous powers during their earthly lives. For example, Gregory wrote that Geneviève had possessed such spiritual power (*virtus*) 'that she even raised the dead.'[65] Similarly, Gregory wrote that a council of bishops, convened to resolve a dispute between the citizens of the Auvergne over who should succeed as bishop, was relieved of its deadlock when a nun

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[61] GM 90, '...*placatur martyr a lacrimis plebi.*'

[62] McNamara, 'Chastity', p. 206.

[63] On the practical differences between the western emphasis on the holy dead, and the eastern emphasis on the living holy man, see Brown, *Cult*, pp. 9-11, 75-85; id., 'Rise', pp. 139-140, 151-152; and id., 'Eastern', pp. 180-186, 190-192, 225-227. There are, of course, many exceptions to this general rule; see David Johnson, 'Divine Justice in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. by Stephen Baxter et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 115-128 (at p. 116); and Hayward, 'Demystifying', pp. 124-127.

[64] Hist. 3.36. Parthenius was the grandson of the emperor Avitus, who served as *Patricius* of Provence, and who enjoyed prominence in Theudebert I's court. Gregory, however, described him merely as a corrupt tax collector. See Stroheker, *Senatorische*, p. 199 (nr 283); Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, pp. 143-145 (nr 166); Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 59; and Heinzelmann, 'Galische', p. 663 (Parthenius 2).

[65] GC 89, '...*ut mortuum suscitaret.*' Geneviève's legacy is unusual because the *Vita Genovefae virginis Parisiensis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *MGH SRM*, 3 (Hannover, 1896), presented her in a manner very similar to episcopal saints, perhaps because this early text had no literary models for non-monastic female saints; see Wood, 'Forgery', pp. 376-378. On date of the *vita*, see Heinzelmann and Poulin, *Vies*, pp. 3-10.

suddenly appeared, proclaiming: 'Hear me, O bishops of the Lord... on this very day the Lord himself shall provide for you one who is worthy.'[66] At this very moment, a man named Rusticus happened to enter the room, and, after the nun pointed him out as God's choice, the bishops in attendance promptly consecrated him to the episcopate.[67]

These examples of living female saints, however, concerned events from past generations. The council in the Auvergne, for example, had been convened in the fifth century. Moreover, in this example the nun had intervened to reprove the bishops only because divine intervention was required in order to repair the episcopal system at a time when it had ceased to function properly.[68] Gregory, therefore, had no interest in challenging the gendered hierarchy that existed between clergy and holy women, and his description of the visionary nun served simply to emphasise God's position as the ultimate judge. However, this passage did recognise that God was willing to use women as the vessel of his will, much as in the preface to the *vita* of Monegund, where Gregory highlighted Mary's essential role as the vessel of salvation. Gregory also clearly believed that, like the Queen of Sheba, women were able to acquire wisdom and to dispense it. For example, Gregory openly admitted that his own mother, Armentaria, was by far his spiritual superior, and he also praised Nicetius of Lyons, who was his maternal granduncle, for being 'so submissive to his mother that he obeyed her as if he were one of her servants.'[69]

There is no reason to believe that Gregory saw women as any more or less inclined to sin than men. In his description of the Fall, he did not blame Eve for the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, writing only: 'The first humans lived blessedly in the pleasures of paradise, until they were lured by the serpent's guile and broke the divine commandments.'[70] The limitations particular to the *inferior sexus* were not the

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[66] Hist. 2.13, '*Audite me, sacerdotes Domini... enim Dominus hodie ipsi sibi providebit antestitem.*' On the passage, see Moreira, *Dreams*, p. 90.

[67] On Rusticus, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 150.

[68] On the contrast between Gregory's willingness to criticise individuals and his hesitancy to question institutions, see Reydellet, *Royauté*, p. 351. This distinction, however, was critiqued by Buc, *Dangers*, pp. 94-95.

[69] VP 8.2, '*...matri tamen ita erat subditus, ut quasi unus ex famulis obaudiret.*'

[70] Hist. 1.1, '*Hi ergo primi hominis inter amoena paradisi beati viventis, anguis astu inlecti, divina praecepta transiliunt...*'. The comment in Hist. 9.39 comparing Chlothild, the rebellious nun mentioned above, to Eve appears in a passage that is a verbatim copy of the judgement issued by the bishops at her trial, and therefore is not representative of Gregory's own thoughts on the

result of Eve's temptation of Adam, nor were they an insurmountable obstacle to sanctity, even if they meant that men were more fitting for episcopal orders. Even Gregory's reluctance to describe contemporary, living holy women as wielding spiritual power over bishops must be tempered by his reading of Matthew 7:22-23, which he took to indicate that miracles worked by the holy dead were inherently more significant that those performed by the living.[71] Holy women were still bound by the obligations expected of the female gender, especially vis-à-vis their relationship with the male episcopal authorities, but this was not indicative of any inherently masculine character of salvation, which was available to men and women alike.

Conclusion

In his works, Gregory attempted to give examples of moral and immoral behaviour, and to detail the consequences, so that he might remind his audience of the prophetic utterance of Isaiah, repeated in each of the Gospels, to make straight the way for the Lord.[72] This path to sanctity was largely the same for men and women, and although Gregory observed that there were certain inherent differences, issues of gender were not a central topic for him. When Gregory did discuss the matter, he acknowledged that masculinity and femininity were both compatible with sanctification. Those who renounced the world by embracing asceticism were still obliged to attend to the expectations that governed male and female relationships. The chaste were not members of a third gender in Gregory's works. Furthermore, although Gregory thought that women faced certain challenges in their quest for sanctity due to their *inferior sexus*, and that they would benefit from acting *viriliter*, he did not articulate this in so extreme an interpretation as to regard the holy woman as a virago. Indeed, Gregory incorporated distinctly female imagery in his account of salvation, which even hinted at certain female aspects of ecclesiology and eschatology. Thus, Gregory's interpretation of gender and sanctification stands in contrast to two models found in other Late Antique sources. His willingness to embrace paradox, likewise, suggests

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matter. On Eve in early medieval literature, see Goetz, *Frauen*, pp. 71-104; and Klaus Thraede, 'Zwischen Eva und Maria: Das Bild der Frau bei Ambrosius und Augustin auf dem Hintergrund der Zeit', in *Frauen in Spätantike*, pp. 129-139.

[71] VP 2.2. See Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 141.

[72] Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke; 3:4; John 1:23.

that he viewed masculinity and femininity not so much as mutually exclusive opposites, but as a mutually necessary contrast, wherein one gave meaning to the other.[73] In this manner, Gregory never seems to have divorced his understanding of a bivalent gender categorisation of male/female from his understanding of an equally bivalent biological categorisation of man/woman.[74] While all of this may be taken to indicate Gregory's individuality, it might also suggest that, as a writer who avoided theological abstraction in favour of simple narratives, Gregory's views came closer to representing the broadly held opinions of the Late Antique world than did the erudite theorising of Ambrose or Jerome.

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[73] On masculinity and femininity as 'mutual constructs', see Johnson, Sally, 'Theorizing Language and Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective', in *Language and Masculinity*, ed. by Sally Johnson and Ulrike Meinhof (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), pp. 8-26 (at pp. 21-24); and Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[74] In this regard, Gregory is in keeping with medieval thought in general; see Joyce Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', in *Handbook*, pp. 81-102 (at pp. 81-82).

VI

ENCLOSURE AND ACCESS TO MONASTIC SHRINES

When Gregory wrote his description of Monegund visiting the shrine of St. Martin in Tours, and the many other passages like it in his hagiography, he revealed how important he thought it was for pious women to have access to the relics of the saints. Gregory, however, faced a problem in the implementation of this ideal in situations where the relics were housed within monasteries, due to the spread of strict monastic enclosure, which prohibited women from entering the grounds of male religious institutions, and vice versa. Strict enclosure was a new trend in sixth-century Gaul, one that had spread with the support of Merovingian ecclesiastical legislation. Although Gregory did not object to strict enclosure *per se*, he included a subtle argument against its application in circumstances when lay access to relics would be hindered. He included a few accounts of miracles that had occurred within a monastic context even though, according to the canons, the recipient of the cure should never have been allowed entry in the first place. In doing so, Gregory suggested that God himself approved of the presence of women within male coenobitic institutions, at least for the purpose of venerating the relics of the saints. In taking this position, Gregory identified himself with a spiritual tradition that flourished in central and western areas of Gaul, rather than the more austere religiosity distinctive of the Mediterranean coast and the Rhône valley. Thus, Gregory's cultural background may have inspired him to a rare moment of dissent from the conciliar consensus. The issues he had with strict enclosure, and his desire to express his opinions on the matter subtly, were only increased by his experiences in 589, when he offered support to a group of nuns who had left the monastic enclosure of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers and come to Tours seeking shelter and supplies. Embarrassingly, these nuns later returned to Poitiers and sacked the monastery, much to Gregory's disdain, and he made an effort in his account of the scandal to distance himself from his earlier involvement – an effort which included reinterpreting the history of the convent itself. Gregory's information can only be corrected once his opinions on enclosure are understood within their broader historical context.

Enclosure and Prohibited Miracles

In an important article published in 2002, Julia M. H. Smith called attention to the relationship between strict enclosure and the veneration of relics.[1] The practice had originated with Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (c. 502-543), who composed two *regulae* (one for monks and one for nuns) that enjoined strict enclosure on the monastic communities, forbidding women from entering the grounds of male religious institutions and vice versa, and this practice subsequently began to spread throughout south-eastern Gaul.[2] Smith suggested that, in this environment, the practice of enclosure was of little consequence for the type of religious devotion prevalent in the Rhône Valley and the Jura Mountains, which had drawn inspiration from the famous monastery of Lérins and its austere spirituality lacking a devotion to relics, an interest in pilgrimage, and an affinity for the miraculous.[3] It was only after the practice spread, with the support of the Councils of Clermont in 535, Tours II in 567, and Auxerre sometime between 585 and 592, that strict enclosure began to encroach on a very different type of spirituality prevalent in central and western Gaul, which had drawn inspiration from the monasteries associated with the legacy of St. Martin.[4]

This Martinian tradition emphasised the veneration of the saints, as well as the miraculous quality of their relics, and it was common for the laity to travel long distances and visit shrines, even in monasteries, in order to beseech the saints for cures

[1] Julia Smith, 'Women at the Tomb: Access to Relic Shrines in the Early Middle Ages', in *GoT*, pp. 163-180 (at 164-172).
[2] Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, Sources Chrétiennes, 345 (Paris, 1988), 36; id., *Regula ad monachos*, PL, 67, 11. These *regulae* served as models for other rules, see Dunn, *Emergence*, pp. 98-104; William Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 265; Cordula Nolte, 'Klosterleben von Frauen in der frühen Merowingerzeit: Überlegungen zur Regula ad virgines des Caesarius von Arles', in *Frauen in der Geschichte*, pp. 257-271; Prinz, *Frühes*, pp. 80-82; Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1960), pp. 158, 161; and Cyrille Lambot, 'Le Prototype des monastères cloîtrés des femmes, l'Abbaye Saint-Jean d'Arles au Vie siècle', *Revue liturgique et monastique*, 23 (1937), 169-174.
[3] On Lérins, see Prinz, *Frühes*, pp. 47-62; Dunn, *Emergence*, pp. 82-84; Paul Lahargou, *De schola Lerinensi aetate Merovingiaca* (Paris: Retaux, 1892); and M. L'Abbé Alliez, *Histoire du Monastère de Lérins*, 2 vols (Paris: A. Bray, 1862).
[4] Tours II, 17; Auxerre, 26. On the date range for Auxerre, see Harmut Atsma, 'Klöster und Mönchtum im bistum Auxerre bis zum Ende des 6. Jahrhunderts', *Francia*, 11 (1983), 1-96 (at 6-9). On Caesarius's influence upon the councils of Gaul (even though he was a Burgundian), see Halford, *Archaeology*, p. 6; and Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, pp. 136-145, 258-259.

or other benefits. In particular, Smith cited four examples of women seeking out relics in the monastic shrines of central and western Gaul that had some association with St. Martin's legacy: Marmoutier, Ligugé, Colombier, and Saint-Yrieix.[5] In doing so, Smith aimed to demonstrate that strict enclosure had only caused a problem regarding access to relics when it had moved into these areas of Gaul, and that it had not been born out of any hostility to women visiting monastic shrines, given the absence of this practice in the south-eastern regions of the Jura and the Rhône, where it originated.[6] In agreeing with this hypothesis, it is possible to make further observations based on the four examples that Smith gave of women seeking out relics in the monastic shrines of central and western Gaul, since three of them derive from Gregory's works, while the fourth, concerning pilgrimages to Marmoutier, also appears in Gregory's writings in a passage that he based on a story told by Paulinus of Périgueux.[7] The first three examples all occurred at a time when, canonically, strict enclosure was already prescribed in the regions containing Ligugé, Colombier, and Saint-Yrieix, and Gregory's reasons for including them in his works may go beyond simply his desire to record the miracles wrought by the saints.

Gregory's description of each miracle leaves little doubt that the rules of enclosure had gone unenforced. During a visit to the monastery in Ligugé, near Poitiers, Gregory was told by the abbot that a local woman, suffering from paralysis, had been brought to the monastery in a cart and then taken into the room where St. Martin had once raised a dead man to life. With difficulty, she crawled to the railing

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[5] On the origins of these institutions, see John Percival, 'Villas and Monasteries in Late Roman Gaul', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48 (1997), 1-12 (at 5-8); Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 421-430; Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 130-131, 155-157; Edward James, 'Archaeology and the Merovingian Monastery', in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. by H. B. Clark and Mary Brennan (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1981), pp. 33-55 (at p. 36); and Prinz, *Frühes*, pp. 21-24.

[6] Smith, 'Women', pp. 163, 180. Smith then demonstrated, in the remainder of the article, that the Carolingian exclusion of women from the relics contained in male religious institutions was based on ancient precedent, rather than 'the misogyny of Carolingian clerics'.

[7] Hist. 5.10, 9.29; VP 9.3; VM 4.30; and Paulinus of Périgueux, *De vita sancti Martini*, ed. by M. Petschenig, *Paulini Petricordiae Carmina: Poetae Christiani minores* 1, CSEL, 16 (Vienna, 1888), 6. GM 75 might also be added to the list, since Gregory described a woman receiving a cure at Agaune. The monastery had originally been a basilica, but it was turned into a monastery by Sigismund in 515, when all women were removed from the institution; see *Vita abbatum Acaunensium absque epitaphiis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM, 7 (Hannover, 1920), 3. Smith concluded that Agaune may only have excluded women briefly, 'Women', pp. 164-165 and n. 5. On the early date of the *vita*, see Jean-Marie Theurillat, , *L'Abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune des origines à la réforme canoniale 515-830* (Sion: Chez l'auteur, 1954), pp. 32-42.

that marked the spot of the former miracle and kissed its cloth covering, at which point her body was miraculously restored to health.[8] Gregory was clear that this had occurred at the very same spot where he, 'in the presence of the monks' (*coram fratribus*), had prayed, wept, and then celebrated mass. Likewise, he wrote that the miracle had occurred 'recently', according to the abbot, which could be no earlier than the 570s, when Gregory first began writing, and thus after the promulgations of Clermont in 535 and Tours II in 567 enjoining strict enclosure on the monasteries of Gaul. In a similar example, Gregory wrote that two blind women had regained their sight when they had kissed the tomb of St. Patroclus, which was in the monastery of Colombier, in the diocese of Bourges.[9] Gregory then mentioned a list of named individuals who had their demons exorcised *ad hoc sancti tumulum*, including the distinctly female names 'Scophilia', 'Nectariola', and 'Tacihildis'. Again, Gregory's account indicated that the cures had occurred within the monastic enclosure, and at a time subsequent to the aforementioned councils, considering that Patroclus died in 576.

In his third example, Gregory wrote that a mute woman had been cured when she kissed the tomb of Aridius, who died in 591, and who had founded a monastery in the Limousin, which was later known as Saint-Yrieix. Gregory also noted that two women possessed by demons had been exorcised during Aridius's interment, writing: 'I believe that God did not wish for these women to be purified until Aridius's funeral, so that the rites would be glorified by his intercessory power.'[10] Gregory's account naturally reads as if Aridius had been buried within Saint-Yrieix, and therefore that strict enclosure had been violated, although the identification in this instance is not explicit, and it remains possible that he had been interred in a church located beyond the monastic enclosure. Indeed, this seems to have been the only strategy used in the sixth-century by monasteries that wished to accommodate both the veneration of relics and the observance of enclosure, and it is evidenced by only a very few examples.[11]

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[8] VM 4.30.

[9] VP 9.3. On the kissing of tombs in Merovingian Gaul, see Crook, *Architectural*, pp. 31-32.

[10] Hist. 10.29, '*Et credo, ob hoc Dei nutu easdem in corpere positus non potuit emundare, ut exequiae illius hac virtute glorificarentur.*' On the view that Gregory may have originally intended this chapter for the *Liber vitae patrum*, see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, p. 58.

[11] This was the case with Radegund's tomb; see Baudonivia, *De vita sanctae Radegundis*, 23-24; with Barbara Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible Cloisters: Gregory of Tours and Episcopal Exemption', in *GoT*, pp. 181-198 (at pp. 189-195); Robert Favreau, 'Le Culte de Sainte Radegonde à Poitiers au Moyen Âge', in *Les religieuses dans le cloître et dans le monde des origines à nos jours* (Saint-Etienne:

Merovingian monasteries eventually developed other strategies to address the problem, such as building a church within the monastic grounds that could accommodate pilgrims in a manner that kept them aloof from the coenobites, but this practice only emerged from the mid-seventh century onwards, around the time when Queen Balthild converted all of the major suburban basilicas into monasteries.[12] The canons themselves made no provisions for any strategies of accommodation, or exceptional circumstances in which the rules of enclosure could be temporarily relaxed.[13]

In all likelihood, Gregory's episcopate represents a transitional period, before strategies had been developed to facilitate the implementation of strict enclosure in certain institutions without resulting in difficulties and tension.[14] The presence of such resistance might explain why a succession of councils felt it necessary to repeat the prescription of strict enclosure.[15] Similarly, the decision of the Council of Auxerre to reduce the punishment for the abbot or *praepositus* who permitted the violation of enclosure from excommunication to three months penance suggests that the issue was not purely theoretical, but that the punishments were tailored by practical

Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1994), pp. 91-109 (at pp. 91-93); and Brian Brennan, 'St. Radegund and the Early Development of her Cult of Poitiers', *Journal of Religious History*, 13 (1985), 340-354. With less certainty, it may also have been employed in the burials of Caesarius and Romanus; on Caesarius, see Klingshirn, *Caesarius*, pp. 104-106, 117-124, 260-261; and McCarthy, *Rule*, pp. 19-25. On Romanus, see below. This is discussed in the context of access to shrines by Smith, 'Women', pp. 170-172; and Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, 'Women's Monasteries and Sacred Space: The Promotion of Saints' Cults and Miracles', in *Gender and Christianity*, pp. 68-86 (at pp. 73-74).

12 See James, 'Archaeology'. The nunnery at Arles may be an exceptionally early example of this practice, see William Klingshirn, 'Caesarius's Monastery for Women in Arles and the Composition and Function of the Vita Caesarii', *Revue Bénédictine*, 100 (1990), 441-481 (at 473). On the strategies employed by monasteries to allow women access without violating the spirit of enclosure, see Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, 'Gender, Celibacy, and Proscriptions of Sacred Space: Symbol and Practice', in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, ed. by Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 185-206 (pp. 186-200); and id., 'Women's', pp. 73-74.

13 In VM 1.2, Gregory described a stational liturgy held on Easter in the Diocese of Tours, which included a stop at the monastery of Marmoutier, and which presumably included women. This, however, should not be seen as evidence of an accepted circumvention of the canons, since he drew his account from the fifth-century work of Paulinus of Périgueux, *De vita sancti Martini*, 6.

14 Cf. Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible', pp. 194-195.

15 See Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, 'Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience (500-1000)', in *Medieval Religious Women*, ed. by John Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, 3 vols (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), I, 51-86 (at I, 63). Words of caution regarding this interpretation of conciliar repetition were expressed by Halford, *Archaeology*, pp. 100-101.

circumstances. [16] Gregory himself was careful to avoid mentioning his own involvement in violating the canons, since the events he recorded at Colombier, Ligugé, and Saint-Yrieix all took place outside of his Diocese of Tours.[17] Nonetheless, his decision to record these miraculous healings is indicative of his opinions on the matter, since they can be read as a subtle argument against the canons. Such miracles proved that God himself was not opposed to women visiting shrines within male religious institutions, since he dispensed cures rather than punishments to them on account of their faith. In other words, the canonical injunctions were inconsistent with the divine will. Gregory' decision to articulate this argument in a rather nonchalant narrative style based on historical examples, rather than on dialectic, is consistent with the approach he undertook concerning other subjects in his works.[18]

Gregory and Exclusion

Although Gregory thought that strict monastic enclosure was inappropriate in situations where it resulted in the inability of one gender or another to venerate the saints, he was not opposed to the idea in general. In his writings, he promoted the ascetic renunciation of worldly desires, and he understood the value in avoiding temptation. His account of Lupicinus, for example, described in positive terms the devout ascetic, who avoided contact with women in life, and who was subsequently buried within his monastery, which practiced strict enclosure. In Gregory's telling, however, Lupicinus had no reputation for curing the sick or other similar miracles. This was unlike his brother, Romanus, who was something of a thaumaturge. Romanus, however, met with women in order to cure them, and he insisted that he be buried outside of the monastery, so that women would have access to his tomb. Gregory, therefore, drew a distinction between those saints known for their ability to heal the sick, and those who had not been graced with such miracles, so that the issue

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[16] Tours II, 17; Auxerre, 26.

[17] There is some evidence to suggest, however, that Ingitrude's convent in the *atrium* of St. Martin's church in Tours did not observe enclosure; see Peyroux, 'Canonists', pp. 253-254.

[18] Buc, *Dangers*, p. 95. On Gregory's use of this literary tactic regarding sanctuary, see James, 'Beati'; and, regarding the legal protections enjoyed by Jews, see Goffart, 'Conversions'; and, regarding the observance of the Christian Sabbath, see Ian Wood, 'Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country', in *The Church in Town and Countryside. Studies in Church History*, 16, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp. 61-76 (at pp. 62-66).

of gender and access to the saints only applied in cases of the former. In cases of the latter, there was nothing objectionable about the practice of enclosure, when undertaken for ascetic purposes.

Gregory recounted the lives of Lupicinus and Romanus together, in the opening section of his *Liber vitae partum*, in a manner that established two different categories of saints – those known for their miracles of healing, and those without such a reputation. Gregory only credited Lupicinus with one miracle, when his entry into Geneva caused the throne of the Burgundian king to shake. Lupicinus beseeched the king, 'like Jacob in the presence of Pharaoh once upon a time', for food and clothing to be given to his monastery, and his request was promptly granted.[19] Impressive though this miracle was, it created no precedent to justify women seeking his intercession, either during his life or following his death, especially those seeking a cure of some ailment. Gregory, therefore, passed no judgement on Lupicinus's decision to be buried within his monastery at Condat, even though strict enclosure was practiced there. Lupicinus's brother Romanus, however, who was renowned for his thaumaturgy, made different arrangements for his interment when he declared: 'My Lord God has given me the grace to work cures, though I am unworthy and without merit; there will be a rush to my tomb once I depart from this light, and so I ask that I be buried at a distance from the monastery.'[20]

Gregory's description of Romanus's burial arrangements is seemingly at odds with the information provided by the *Vita patrum Jurensium*, a work composed c. 520 at the behest of the Abbot of Lérins, which recounted the lives of Romanus and Lupicinus as a guide for ambitious ascetics.[21] According to the *Vita patrum Jurensium*, Romanus was buried in La Balme – a large convent where his sister served as abbess.[22] If one assumes that Gregory was well-informed, then it might be concluded that La Balme

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[19] VP 1.5, '...*sicut quondam Iacob coram Pharaone.*'

[20] VP 1.6, '...*mihi indigno et non merenti dominus Deus meus gratiam tribuit curationum... Erit autem concursus ad tumulum meum, si ab hac luce migravero. Ideoque rogo, ut eminus a monasterio requisecam.*'

[21] *Vita patrum Jurensium*, ed. by F. Martine, *Vie des pères du Jura* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 3.26. On the date of the work, see F. Masai, 'La Vita patrum Iurensium et les débuts du monachisme à Saint-Maurice d'Agaune', in *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Johanne Autenrieth and Franz Brunhölzl (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1971).

[22] *Vita patrum Jurensium*, 1.19.

did not practice strict enclosure.[23] It is also possible that Romanus was only concerned that women were able to access his tomb, and so his burial in a convent that excluded men was consistent with his wishes. This interpretation fits a narrow reading of Gregory's account, where he had Romanus specify: 'I would not like to have my tomb in a monastery, where women are prohibited access.'[24] Nonetheless, the spirit of Gregory's account, which contrasts the miraculous Romanus with the austere Lupicinus, suggests he thought that Romanus was a fitting source of intercession for both men and women. For example, Gregory wrote that, 'Lupicinus steadfastly avoided meeting with or talking to women, while Romanus was so simple (*simplex*) that none of this entered deeply into his soul, and he instead gave his besought blessings to all men and women equally, invoking the name of God.'[25] Whether or not Gregory had read the *Vita patrum Jurensium* – and it has generally been concluded that he had not – his description of Romanus's burial serves as an indicator of his thematic contrast between the spirituality of Lupicinus and Romanus, and the boundaries in which the practice of strict enclosure could be implemented without interfering with the divine will.[26]

This point is further illustrated by the very different versions of a certain event described in both the *Vita patrum Jurensium* and in Gregory's account of Romanus and Lupicinus. According to the *Vita patrum Jurensium*, Romanus became so frustrated with some of his monks at Condat, who had developed a taste for fine cuisine, that he summoned his brother to the monastery, who promptly replaced the monks' refined food with bland porridge.[27] Although the monks accepted the change out of respect for Lupicinus's reputation, their attitude changed when he considered taking Romanus's place as abbot of the monastery permanently (because he liked the porridge so much). The gluttonous monks, therefore, decided to leave. In this version of the story, Lupicinus was an expert ascetic, whose clever leadership had exposed and ferreted out several half-hearted monks. In Gregory's rather different version of the story,

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[23] Schulenburg, 'Gender', pp. 195-196.
[24] VP 1.6, '*Non potest fieri, ut ego in monasterio sepulchrum habebam, a quo mulierum accessus arcetur.*'
[25] VP 1.2, '*...mulierum quoque vel colloquia vel occursus valde vitabat. Romanus ita erat simplex, ut nihil de his penitus ad animum duceret, sed omnibus tam viris quam mulieribus aequaliter flagitatam benedictionem, Divinitas nomine invocato, tribueret.*'
[26] James, *Gregory*, pp. 3-4, n. 1; Smith, 'Women', p. 167, n. 14.
[27] *Vita patrum Jurensium*, 1.13.

Lupicinus happened to visit Romanus's monastery (in Alamania, rather than Condat), when he discovered that some monks were eating food unbecoming of an ascetic, so he took all of the gourmet cuisine and cooked it into a stew.[28] Outraged at this rash insult, twelve angry monks decided to abandon the monastery. Romanus only became aware of the event afterwards, when it was miraculously revealed to him in a vision, which caused him to scold Lupicinus for his foolishness and to pray for the wayward band, who eventually did penance and founded their own monasteries. Thus, for Gregory, while Lupicinus deserved praise for his ability to follow a strict form of asceticism, it was inappropriate for him to impose this upon the other monks, whose venture into the wilderness was reminiscent of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. In the same way, one individual might choose to avoid women as part of his ascetic devotion, but this virtue ought not to be imposed on every monk in every monastery, especially those who, like Romanus, had the ability to heal the sick.

One example of the individual saint who, like Lupicinus, followed an austere form of asceticism that included the avoidance of contact with women, and who similarly had not been entrusted with the gift of healing by God, was Simeon the Stylite.[29] According to Gregory, Simeon spent his life sitting on a column, and he refused to allow women to visit him, or to look upon him, including even his own mother. Even in death, Simeon continued to protect his pillar from the approach of women, as one discovered when she attempted to sneak into the church housing the pillar by disguising herself as a man, only to be stricken dead the moment she crossed the threshold. Gregory's account is particularly surprising in its context, since he had praised St. Papula, who had disguised herself in order to enter into a male religious institution, only ten short chapters previously (as discussed earlier in this study). Gregory's purpose for recounting his story about Simeon's pillar, however, was not related to monasticism or enclosure in general, since the pillar was located in a church (*basilica*), nor the question of lay access to curative relics, but simply the integrity of Simeon's austere asceticism, which was not applicable to most saints. This becomes especially apparent when Gregory's description of the pillar is compared to its actual setting in sixth-century Syria. The pillar was located within a fifth-century basilica,

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[28] VP 1.3.
[29] GC 26.

Qualat Siman, which was itself part of a vast monastic complex. According to Gregory's contemporary Evagrius, who had visited the site, it was customary for a mass of pilgrims and villagers to circumambulate the pillar with their livestock.[30] In other words, Simeon's column was the opposite of what Gregory described – a wondrous relic, housed within a monastic environment, and frequented by pilgrims.

Whether or not Gregory wrote in ignorance of these details, he clearly shaped his account of Simeon's pillar in a manner consistent with his overall views on lay access to relics, and the different approaches to asceticism prevalent in sixth-century Gaul. As his account of Romanus and Lupicinus demonstrates, Gregory acknowledged the spiritual value of different forms of asceticism, one in which ascetics avoided all contact with the opposite sex, and another in which such interaction was allowed, so long as one possessed a simple innocence (*simplicitas*), as Romanus had.[31] The validity of the latter practice was confirmed by God, when he chose to endow certain saints with the ability to work cures, which were to be dispensed to all. The practice of enclosure, therefore, was only appropriate in circumstances when it did not inhibit the faithful from seeking out such cures, and from venerating the relics of wonder-working saints. This was demonstrated, by implication, in Gregory's account of miracles involving women at shrines within male religious institutions. Anyone familiar with such incidents could only acknowledge that God himself agreed with Gregory's balanced view, no matter how rigid the canonical regulations were.

Cultural Differences within Gaul

Gregory's contrast between Lupicinus and Romanus is reminiscent of the distinction between the spiritual practices of south-eastern Gaul, centred on the religious atmosphere of Lérins, and those of the central and western Gaul, as expressed by the Martinian tradition of places such as Colombier, Ligugé, and Saint-Yrieix. It also calls to mind the comprehensive study of Gallic monasticism undertaken by Friedrich Prinz,

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[30] Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.14. See Anthony Eastmond, 'Body vs. Column: The Cult of St Symeon Stylites', in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. by Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), pp. 87-100 (at pp. 93-94). Qualat Siman had been built, perhaps under the patronage of Emperor Zeno, between 476 and 490, i.e. soon after Simeon's death; see Georges Tchalenki, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord: Le massif du bélus a l'époque romaine*, 3 vols (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1953-1958), I, 231-233.

[31] VP 1.3.

who called attention to the cultural differences between the Provence, where a rather urbane and erudite asceticism had become widespread, and the more northerly areas of Neustria and Austrasia, which were more of an eremitic frontier, possessing fewer monasteries and lacking ancient pedigree.[32] Of course, Lupicinus and Romanus were both monks of the Jura Mountains, connected to Mediterranean antiquity by the Rhône Valley and its flourishing Lérinois interpretation of asceticism, and Gregory's account of the two is best seen as a literary construct, fashioned in view of his greater themes on monasticism.[33] However, for this reason, Gregory's account indicates how he interpreted the broad cultural differences in Gaul, and where he located himself in this landscape.[34] Indeed, his support for the lay veneration of relics within monastic shrines, as well as his preference for simple historical examples rather than abstract philosophical argumentation, suggests that he identified more with the Martinian tradition of spirituality than with the austere and intellectual heritage of Lérins. For Gregory, the *simplicitas* he attributed to Romanus was an essential virtue, one that he sought to incorporate into his own writings.

This is indicated by Gregory's account of Domnulus, head of the monks at St. Laurence's church in Paris, who was offered the Bishopric of Avignon by Chlothar I, but who refused the position because he feared that he would be ridiculed by sophisticated senators and philosophising prefects (*senatores sophistici ac iudices philosophici*) on account of his *simplicitas*.[35] Domnulus was no simpleton – besides his position in an important Parisian church, he had been a confidant of the king, and he

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[32] Prinz, *Frühes*, especially pp. 68-69. See also Ian Wood, 'A Prelude to Columbanus: the Monastic Achievement in the Burgundian Territories', in *Columbanus*, pp. 3-32.

[33] On the monasticism the Rhône, see also Gérard Mayse, Les Origines du monachisme dans les diocèse de Besançon (Ve-Xe siècle)', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 131 (1973), 21-104 (at 56-70).

[34] This is not to suggest a return to the old view of Late Antique Gaul as separated into 'Barbarian' and 'Roman' zones, divided by the Loire, as expressed, for example, by Riché, *Education*, pp. 177-183, 210-218. The categories of 'Barbarian' and 'Roman' are perhaps too much of an oversimplification to be helpful, at least by the sixth-century. On this point, see Hen, *Culture*, pp. 5-6. It is nonetheless possible to distinguish a difference in culture between the regions of Gaul. The surviving Merovingian manuscripts, for example, reflect the fact that the Rhône valley had a different sort of literary output that the rest of Gaul; see Rosamond McKitterick, 'The Scriptoria of Merovingian Gaul: A Survey of the Evidence', in *Columbanus*, pp. 173-207 (at p. 174). The archaeological evidence has been interpreted similarly by Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 179-180, 476-477, 509-514.

[35] Hist. 6.9. See Conrad Leyser, 'Divine Power Flowed from this Book: Ascetic Language and Episcopal Authority in Gregory of Tours' Life of the Fathers', in *GoT*, pp. 281-294 (at p. 283, n. 7); Wood, 'Prelude', p. 9; and Riché, *Education*, pp. 188-189.

was apparently of noble birth.[36] For Gregory, however, *simplicitas* was a virtue, one that indicated innocence rather than ignorance. He had applied it as a compliment to Romanus, in a manner perhaps inspired by its use in the Book of Job, where it frequently appears as a characteristic of the protagonist.[37] Therefore, Domnulus's fear that the post at Avignon would be one of humiliation rather than honour (*locus humilitatis... quam honoris*) was a criticism of the culture of the Provence, rather than the intelligence of Domnulus himself. As Gregory recounted, Domnulus later accepted the Bishopric of Le Mans, which was within the Metropolitanate of Tours, where he served for twenty-two years without worry of ridicule or degradation. Gregory clearly sympathised with Domnulus and, without pushing this example too far, it can be taken as suggestive of the cultural differences within Gaul, at least insofar as Gregory perceived them.[38]

In describing Domnulus's disparagers as *sophistici* and *philosophici*, Gregory was touching on a broader theme within his works, since he often mentioned that his own style of Latin prose fell short of the standards of eloquent rhetoricians.[39] For example, in the preface to the *Historiae*, Gregory explained that his common Latin had certain advantages, since 'few understand a philosophising rhetor, but many understand a rustic speaker'.[40] This has parallels with the prefaces of his other works, where simplicity of expression was characterised in moral terms, such as in the *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini*, where Gregory said that the insecurity he felt concerning his rusticity was assuaged by the fact that God had chosen fishermen and rustics, rather than orators and philosophers, to destroy the vain wisdom of the world.[41] Similarly, in

[36] On Domnulus, see Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte*, I, 165. On his church in Paris, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 209-210.
[37] Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3, 9:21, 31:6. On *simplicitas* as a virtue, see Hist. 2.1; VP 1.3.
[38] For words of caution regarding the use of this passage as indicative of the broader cultural difference, see Leyser, 'Divine', pp. 283-285; and Wood, 'Administration', pp. 75-76.
[39] GC preface; VM 2, preface; VJ 4; VP preface, 2 preface, 8 preface, 9 preface; Hist. 1 preface, 5.6, 10.31.
[40] Hist. preface, '...*philosophantem rhetorem intellegunt pauci, loquentem rusticum multi.*' On the issue of style and audience, see Wood, 'Administration', pp. 71-73; and Roger Collins, 'Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul', in *Columbanus*, pp. 105-131 (on pp. 111-112).
[41] VM 1 preface, '*Sed quid timeo rusticitatem mean, cum dominus Redemptor et deus noster ad distruendam mundanae sapientiae vanitatem non oratores sed piscatores, nec philosophos sed rusticos praeelegit?*'

the preface to his *Liber in gloria martyrum*, Gregory criticised those who took a special interest in classical works, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, and said that it was wrong 'to follow the wisdom of the philosophers at variance with God.'[42] Gregory clearly wished to make the virtue of *simplicitas* his own, and to allow this to permeate his writings. In doing so, he was making a conscious choice to employ a style of writing less elevated than he was in fact capable of, rather than simply justifying a lack of literary ability.[43]

Gregory's rustic Latin is not particularly indicative of his level of erudition, which is clear in various places in his works – ironically, more in the prefaces than anywhere else.[44] For example, Guy Halsall has demonstrated the rhetorical skill present in the preface to Book 5 of the *Historiae*.[45] Gregory also hinted that he possessed a level of secular knowledge that he professed to abjure, such as in the preface of the *Liber in gloria martyrum*, where he expressed his rejection of classical subjects by recounting, rather unnecessarily, a summary of the first eight books of Virgil's *Aeneid*.[46] Likewise, in the preface to the *Liber vitae patrum*, Gregory wrote that he had preferred this title to the more conventional *Liber vitarum patrum* because Pliny the Elder had written that *vita* had no plural, even though 'Aulus Gellius and many other philosophers preferred to use *vitae*.'[47] Gregory even ventured to take pride in his level

[42] GM preface, *'philosophroum inimicam Deo sapientiam sequi.'*

[43] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 30; Thürlemann, *Historische*, pp. 59-72; and de Nie, *Views*, pp. 19-26.

[44] On Gregory's education, see Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 118-119; Verdon, *Grégoire*, pp. 14-21, 89-101; Godefroid Kurth, 'Grégoire de Tours et les études classiques au VIe siècle', in *Études franques*, I, 1-29; Riché, *Education*, pp. 193-206; and Kurth, 'Grégoire de Tours et les études classiques'. Gregory's appraisal of the rusticity of his Latin, however, has been judged an accurate one; see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 311-319; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 145-150; Martínez Pizarro, *Rhetoric*, pp. 35-36; Thürlemann, *Historische*, pp. 59-72; Buchner, *Gregor*, I, xxxvi; Helmut Beumann, 'Gregor von Tours und der sermo rusticus', in *Spiegel der Geschichte: Festschrift für Max Braubach zum 10. April 1964*, ed. by Konrad Repgen and Stephen Skalweit (Münster: Aschendorff, 1964), pp. 69-98 (at pp. 81-89); Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 91-97; Bonnet, *Latin*, pp. 77-79; and Dalton, *History*, I, 20, n. 1.

[45] Halsall, 'Preface'; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 30-31; Jean-Baptiste Joungblut, 'Recherches sur le 'rythme oratoire' dans les Historiarum libri', in *Gregorio di Tours: 10-13 octobre 1971* (Todi : Presso l'Accademia tudertina, 1977), pp. 327-364; and Bonnet, *Latin*, pp. 726, 743-744.

[46] Gregory borrowed from Virgil about fifty times in all, see Kurth, 'Grégoire', pp. 15-20. Gregory also knew some Sallust and Horace. It is unclear whether this indicates knowledge of the whole texts, or perhaps simply an anthology of classical authors; see Wilhelm Levison, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols (Weimar: Böhlaus, 1952), I, 100, and n. 216.

[47] VP preface, *'A. Gellius quoque et conplures philosophorum vitas dicere voluerunt.'* Gregory's reference is of Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, ed. by John Rolfe, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, 3 vols (London: Heinemann, 1927-1952), 1.3.1, 13.2.1. Pliny's work is no longer extant.

of education, when he criticised Cautinus for being 'totally ignorant of all literature, both secular and ecclesiastic.'[48] Gregory also criticised King Chilperic for his lack of literary skill, defended his colleague Praetextatus from his literary critics, and insulted a false prophet on account of his uneducated speech.[49] The only way that Gregory was able to write such passages without a hint of hypocrisy was because his own stylistic shortcomings had been a pious choice, rather than a consequence of ignorance.

When Gregory indicated that his writing style was tailored for a wide audience, he was indicating less about the level of education of his readership and more about their interpretation of virtue and spirituality. Neither Gregory nor Domnulus were likely to be less educated than the austere ecclesiastics of Provence and the Rhône Valley.[50] But Gregory's desire to understand God in concrete events, such as in the miraculous, contrasted the more philosophical approach of men like the ecclesiastics of Avignon. Gregory himself belonged to an Auvergnat family, with connections in both Austrasia and Burgundy, but one that had a history of promoting the veneration of the saints, at least on their own properties. This included not only the veneration of Julian in Brioude and Benignus in Dijon, but also the shrine of St. Martin in the Diocese of Tours, which had been under his family's influence.[51] Furthermore, Gregory's mother, Armentaria, had been a pious devotee of the saints and their relics, and her spirituality had made a significant impression on her son.[52] It is little surprise, therefore, to find that Gregory thought that *simplicitas* was a virtue, or that access to relics outweighed a monastery's need to cordon off the temptations of the world. Gregory, of course, respected the austere spirituality of the monastic tradition that had emerged from the Côte d'Azur, but his own approach to the divine was less abstract, based instead on the

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[48] Hist. 4.12, *'De ominibus enim scripturis, tam ecclesiasticis quam saecularibus, adplene immunis fuit.'* On Cautinus of Clermont, see Wood, 'Ecclesiastical', p. 52; Moreira, *Dreams*, p. 92; Van Dam, *Confessors*, pp. 24-25, n. 34; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 80-83.

[49] Hist. 5.48, 8.20, 9.6. Gregory wrote that the false prophet had engaged in *nigromantia*, which strictly speaking meant to conjure the dead for purposes of divination, although it had also acquired a broader meaning; see Charles Barnett, 'Magic as Science? Necromancy among the Seven Liberal Arts', in *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 1-15 (at pp. 2-3).

[50] On Gregory as a writer, and the state of Gallic literary culture in general, see Wood, 'Individuality', p. 39; id., *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 27-31; id., 'Administration, Law, and Culture'; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 112-119; Hen, *Culture*, pp. 21-42; and Riché, *Education*, pp. 177-246, 266-274, 279-303, 421-446.

[51] Wood, 'Individuality', pp. 43-38; Wood, 'Early', pp. 74-75.

[52] See Chapter I.

desire to discern the divine will by approaching the shrines of the saints – those 'places where Paradise could be found on earth,' as Peter Brown eloquently put it.[53]

Enclosure and Scandal at Sainte-Croix

Gregory's opinions about enclosure seem to have been at work in his reference to Caesarius's *Regula ad virgines*, which he gave in his account of the convent of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers.[54] Gregory wrote that the monastery's foundress, Radegund, had been inspired to adopt the rule following a dispute with her diocesan bishop, Maroveus. However, there are reasons to believe that, to the contrary, Sainte-Croix had actually been using the Rule since its foundation years earlier, as will be established below. Gregory's decision to connect the adoption of Caesarius's rule in Poitiers to the dispute, which he though had resulted from Maroveus's failure to fulfil his pastoral duties, allowed him to present the adoption of strict enclosure in less than ideal terms. Furthermore, Gregory mentioned this event in the context of a dispute that had erupted in Sainte-Croix in 589, when a group of malcontent nuns left the enclosure, in violation of the Rule, and sought royal support for a number of grievances they had against their abbess. Gregory himself had originally provided some assistance to the wayward nuns, and this may later have been a source of embarrassment for him, since the dispute eventually deteriorated into an open rebellion, in which the monastery was sacked and its relics desecrated, not to mention the mistreatment that Gregory's niece suffered, who was one of the nuns loyal to the abbess. Gregory's anachronistic account of Sainte-Croix's adoption of Caesarius's rule, therefore, also bears the marks of later circumstances, since he wished to present his own involvement in the scandal of 589 as an extension of the earlier dispute, and the unresolved tensions created by the practice of enclosure.

According to Gregory, Radegund's conflict with her local bishop, Maroveus, began following her acquisition of fragments of the True Cross from the Byzantines, when Maroveus refused to install the sacred relics in her convent of Sainte-Croix.[55] After Maroveus obstinately left Poitiers and took up residence in a country villa,

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[53] Brown, *Rise*, p. 162.
[54] Hist. 9.40.
[55] Hist. 9.39-40. Gregory's account of the acquisition of the relics seems to have telescoped two different trips to the East into one; See Moreira, 'Provisatrix'.

Radegund sought the assistance of King Sigibert, who commanded Bishop Eufronius of Tours to enshrine the relics, which he promptly did with due liturgical ceremony.[56] Subsequently, Maroveus refused Radegund's attempts at reconciliation, and so she and her abbess were forced to turn to Arles and to obtain Caesarius's *Regula ad virgines.* Gregory then added, 'because they were not able to find any security from the one who ought to have been their pastor, they entrusted themselves to the protection of the king,' suggesting perhaps that the use of strict enclosure placed the institution outside the reach of the local bishop, even though the Rule itself listed episcopal visits as a legitimate exception.[57] Gregory then concluded by writing that, after Radegund's death and more overtures on the part of the abbess, Agnes, Maroveus was finally reconciled with the nuns and, as a result, reacquired oversight of Sainte-Croix from King Childebert II. Gregory concluded by questioning Maroveus's sincerity: 'I believe that something rather inexplicable lingered in his heart, and, as the nuns alleged, this put the scandal into motion' – referencing the decision of several nuns to leave the monastery in 589, a decade and a half after the original dispute.[58]

There are several problems with Gregory's statement that Radegund had acquired Caesarius's rule following her dispute with Maroveus, rather than at an earlier date.[59] A poem written by either Radegund or her close confidant, Venantius Fortunatus, referred to her as living according to the practice of enclosure, even though this letter was written prior to her acquisition of the relics of the True Cross.[60] Likewise, a letter written by Caesaria the Younger, Abbess of Saint-Jean in Arles, to Radegund indicates that Sainte-Croix had already received a copy of Caesarius's rule during

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[56] Hist. 9.40. On Eufronius's involvement, see Pietri, *Ville,* pp. 229-235. On the view that this dispute was between Maroveus and Sigibert, rather than Radegund, see Widdowson, 'Merovingian', pp. 13-14.

[57] Hist. 9.40, '...*regis se tuitione munierunt, scilicet quia in illum, qui pastor esse debuerat, nullam curam defensiones suae potuerant repperire.*' On Sainte-Croix and royal protection, see Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible', pp. 190-192; and Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms,* pp. 137-138.

[58] Hist. 9.40, '*Sed, nescio quid, credo, adhuc in eius animis resedisset, ut haec puellae adserunt, quod moveret scandalum.*'

[59] On the problem, see Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, *Césaire d'Arles, Oeuvres monastiques: introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, I: Oeuvres pour les moniales* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988), pp. 443-460.

[60] *De excidio Thoringiae,* ed. by Frederic Leo, *MGH AA,* 4.1 (Berlin, 1881), lines 105-106, '*sacra monasterii si me non claustra tenerent, inprovisa aderam qua regione sedes.*' On the authorship and date of this poem, see Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg, eds, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 65, n. 22.

Caesaria's lifetime, even though she died in 559, several years before the dispute with Maroveus. [61] Lastly, one of Radegund's letters mentioned the founding of the monastery, together with the adoption of Caesarius's rule, and the appointment of Agnes as abbess, which might be taken to suggest that the Rule (and hence strict enclosure) had been an integral part of the institution from its inception.[62] Indeed, it stands to reason that Radegund's convent would have needed a rule upon its foundation, and Caesaria's convent of Saint-Jean in Arles was one of the few female religious institutions in Gaul that could serve as an exemplar. Radegund seems to have drawn inspiration from Saint-Jean in other ways, since the positioning of her convent in the landscape of Poitiers was very similar to Caesaria's convent in Arles.[63]

Radegund's use of enclosure as prescribed by the Rule of Caesarius may actually have been one of the causes of the dispute with Maroveus, rather than one of the consequences. Although Gregory declined to give Maroveus's rationale for refusing to install the relics of the Cross in Sainte-Croix, one reason may have been his reluctance to see the powerful objects placed within a monastic shrine where men were forbidden access.[64] Of course, Maroveus probably had other reasons as well. The relics of the Cross were a threat to his own position within Poitiers because they outclassed the relics of St. Hilary, the great fourth-century opponent of Arianism whose cult was essential to the prestige of the local bishop.[65] As a former Merovingian queen, Radegund was already an intimidating presence in the city, and she had built her convent next to Maroveus's cathedral, in a prominent location within the city. The tomb of Hilary, and so the relics important to Maroveus, were located outside city

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[61] *Epistolae aevi Merovingici collectae*, 11. See, Gäbe, 'Radegundis', p. 11, n. 63; Meyer, *Gelegenheitsdichter*, pp. 97-98, 101-102; and Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 32, n. 109. On the authenticity of the letter, see Yvonne Labande-Mailfert, 'Les Débuts de Sainte-Croix', in *Histoire de l'abbaye Sainte-Croix de Poitiers: Quatorze siècle de vie monastique*, ed. by Edmond-René Labande (Poitiers: Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1986), pp. 25-75 (at pp. 42-44).

[62] Hist. 9.42. On the letter, see Smith, 'Radegundis', pp. 307-309. A version of the text with alterations, which was preserved at Poitiers, is found in Pardessus, *Diplomata*, I, 150-154.

[63] For a comparison of the two, see Vieillard-Troiekouroff, *Monuments*, pp. 38-39, 220-229. Caesarius was also venerated at Sainte-Croix, see Fortunatus, *Carmina*, appendix 13.

[64] Rosenwein, 'Inaccessible', pp. 192-194.

[65] Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 30-36; Wood, 'Topographies', p. 153; McNamara, 'Imitatio', pp. 64-65. Radegund may also have had difficulties with Maroveus's predecessor, Pascentius; see Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 30-33. Maroveus himself may have had royal connections given his name, which is a form of Merovech, see Gerberding, *Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 43.

walls, beyond the ancient amphitheatre.[66] Even with these other motivations, however, Maroveus may have felt justified in his refusal to install the relics of the Cross in Radegund's convent on the grounds that he was acting out of pastoral concerns, assuming that the practice of strict enclosure had already been in place prior to the arrival of the relics.

Gregory gave the history of Sainte-Croix, and its adoption of the Rule, as a digression in his account of events within Sainte-Croix in 589, when a group of malcontent nuns, led by two royal members of the institution named Chlothild and Basina, left the enclosure and came to Tours.[67] Gregory's decision to characterise the use of Caesarius's rule in Sainte-Croix as a result of Maroveus's pastoral failings had direct relevance for his account of the wayward nuns, since it explained his decision to provide shelter for them while they sought to have their grievances heard by King Guntram. Although Poitiers lay within the Metropolitanate of Bordeaux, rather than Tours, Eufronius had established a precedent when he had intervened to perform the pastoral duties that Maroveus has neglected.[68] Gregory inherited these obligations toward Sainte-Croix, and he may have felt somewhat uncomfortable about them, since he showed a measure of tact in his dealings with Maroveus on the issue.[69] But he chose to present his involvement with the wayward nuns of 589 as resulting from obligations

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[66] The landscape was similar at Arles, where the convent of Saint-Jean was located just within the city walls, while the funerary church of St. Genesius lay well outside the city. The relics of Saint-Jean, however, were housed in a church outside of the cloister; see Klingshirn, 'Caesarius's Monastery', p. 473. The friendly arrangement at Arles was surely benefited by the fact that Caesaria was the sister of the local bishop.

[67] Hist. 9.39-43, 10.15-17. On the scandal, see Sarah Rütjes, *Der Klosterstreit in Poitiers: Untersucht anhand der hagiographischen Quellen von Gregor von Tours 'Decem libri historiarum'* (Norderstedt: Grin, 2009); Dunn, *Emergence*, pp. 109-110; McNamara, *Sisters*, pp. 110-111; Ennen, *Frauen*, pp. 52-55; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 173-175; Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 330-333; Pontal, *Synoden*, pp. 149-151; Scheibelreiter, 'Königstöchter'; and Eckenstein, *Women*, pp. 65-71. On Chlothild's claim to be of royal stock, see Widdowson, 'Merovingian', p. 4; and Wood, 'Deconstructing', p. 158.

[68] Gregory was certainly not inventing this precedent. Radegund had visited St. Martin's church in Tours, and patronised the shrine financially, before founding Sainte-Croix; see Fortunatus, *De vitae sanctae Radegundis*, 14; cf. Hist. 4.15. According to Baudonivia, Radegund had turned to Eufronius and asked him to house the relics of the Cross in Tours even before Sigibert's intervention; see Baudonivia, *De vita sanctae Radegundis*, 16. Gregory apparently inherited this special relationship between Radegund and Tours when he became bishop, since his acquisition of the post itself was due in part to her royal influence. Gregory owned a robe that had once been wrapped around the relics of the True Cross, and he also kept a relic of the Cross in an oratory in St. Martin's; see Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 2.3; GC 20; GM 14; with Pietri, *Ville*, pp. 402-403, 500-501.

[69] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 73-74; and Van Dam, *Saints*, pp. 30-41.

that the Bishop of Tours had toward the nuns of Sainte-Croix, since the dispute with Maroveus had never truly been resolved. Chlothild and Basina claimed that they had been driven to leave Sainte-Croix because of the hypocritical manner in which their abbess, Leubovera, applied the strictures of enclosure, and apparently because they thought that Maroveus would be of no avail in the matter. Although Leubovera had expected her nuns to abide by every letter of the Rule, she herself had allowed workmen to bath in the convent's baths, and had entertained important laymen in the convent, including one occasion when a coming-of-age ceremony involving the ritual first shave of a young man was celebrated (known as a *barbatoria*).[70]

While in Tours, many of the wayward nuns had decided to break their vows of celibacy and marry 'evil men', only to then return to Poitiers and assemble a band of 'thieves, murderers, adulterers, and every manner of criminal', who then stormed Sainte-Croix and captured the abbess.[71] The rebellion was eventually suppressed when Macco, the *Comes* of Poitiers, launched an assault against the outlaws, during which the monastery was desecrated, that resulted in the apprehension of Chlothild and her subsequent trial. Gregory's own niece, Justina, had suffered during the chaos, since she had remained loyal to Leubovera. When Chlothild later faced an ecclesiastical tribunal for her subsequent misdeeds, her accusations against Leubovera were found to be trivial in comparison to her actions and those of her malcontent nuns, who had acted 'against their rule' (*contra suam regulam*) when they had left the enclosure of Sainte-Croix and come to Tours.[72] Gregory, therefore, had every reason to feel a sense of embarrassment about his support of the wayward nuns, considering their subsequent behaviour. He only mentioned his own involvement in order to downplay it, writing that the nuns had arrived in Tours uninvited, and that they were in a desperate state – on foot, with few supplies, during the treacherous spring thaw. His intervention, therefore, was one of charity, forced upon him as a consequence, ultimately, of the strict enclosure practiced at Sainte-Croix, which had been adopted only as a result of

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[70] On the *barbatoria*, which was an ancient Roman custom, see Diesenberger, 'Hair', pp. 184-187; Hen, *Culture*, pp. 138-143; Riché, *Education*, pp. 233-234; Eckhardt, *Studia*, pp. 254-256; and Lynch, *Godparents*, pp. 180-181.

[71] Hist. 9.40, '*congregatis secum furibus, homicidis, adulteris omniumque criminum reis*' Chlothild may have taken others prisoner as well, given Gregory's reference to prisoners released from Poitiers during Easter, 590; see VM 4.16; with Van Dam, *Saints*, p. 292, n. 103.

[72] Hist. 10.16. The words are from a copy of the bishops' judgement that Gregory included in his *Historiae*.

the irresponsible behaviour of Maroveus. By giving this interpretation, Gregory managed to absolve himself, and to identify strict enclosure as a problem, but without insulting the memory of St. Radegund.

Conclusion

Gregory's decision to mention problems associated with enclosure in his account of Chlothild's rebellion, and especially his dubious claim that Sainte-Croix had only begun practising enclosure as a consequence of Maroveus's pastoral shortcomings, indicates that he viewed enclosure as problematic, at least in places that were not accustomed to such austere spirituality. This is reflected in his argument against the use of enclosure in monasteries that housed important shrines, when Gregory recounted miracles that would never have occurred if the canons had been observed. His suggestion that God himself was at odds with the ubiquitous adherence to strict enclosure in Gaul is conspicuous. It was certainly possible to give the opposite interpretation. Peter the Venerable, for example, described a miracle at the Cluniac monastery of Mareigny, that occurred when a fire had broken out threatening the nuns in the cloister. Although the Archbishop of Lyon had tried to convince the nuns to leave the inferno, the sisters refused on the grounds that an escape would violate the rules of enclosure, and they were eventually saved when a miracle snuffed the flames.[73] While this account aimed to demonstrate that divine favour was shown on those who faithfully upheld the practice of enclosure, in Gregory's view God was more likely to reward those who violated enclosure in order to seek out the intercession of the saints.

This is not to suggest that Gregory completely opposed the practice. He respected ascetics who shunned contact with members of the opposite sex, so long as that was consistent with God's will. Likewise, he had no objection to institutions founded on this principle, as long as they did not possess curative relics. As an Auvergnat, Gregory had more than a passing familiarity with this tradition, but he preferred the sort of spirituality characteristic of the shrines within his family's oversight, including St. Martin's shrine in Tours, rather than the austerity of strict enclosure. Gregory himself seems to have identified with the likes of Domnulus, and

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[73] Peter the Venerable, *De miraculis libri duo*, ed. by Denise Bouthillier, *Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis*, 83 (Turnhout, 1988), 1.22.

he thought of his audience in the same terms. Eventually, the point of tension between strict enclosure and access to monastic shrines was resolved through architectural strategies, and the practice of enclosure became part of the Carolingian inheritance. This, however, ought not to overshadow the state of affairs in the latter half of the sixth century, which represents a transitional period when strict enclosure found its dissenters, including Gregory himself, in a rather moderate way. Gregory, though a bishop, was willing to call into question the rationale behind the canons on occasion, and to illustrate this, albeit subtly, in his writings.

CONCLUSION

Like his many other themes, Gregory presented his information on women in a manner consistent with his principal concern: to illustrate the nature of virtue. Gregory drew upon historical and contemporary material in order to fashion narratives aimed at communicating moral truths, so that his audience would be inspired to follow the straight path – the *semita recta* of revelation – that led the believer, male or female, into paradise. Any attempt to use his corpus as a source of information, therefore, must first attend to the way in which he selected and fashioned his evidence for this end. Furthermore, Gregory's pastoral concerns were burdened by political circumstances that necessarily influenced how he interpreted events, and the liberties he took in presenting them. Several powerful Merovingian women left their mark on his writings, often in ways that are difficult to detect. Gregory also had to meet the expectations of his audience, since the effectiveness of his preaching depended, in part, on the plausibility of his evidence. Therefore, this analysis has sought to employ a literary analysis of Gregory's text, along with a historical analysis of his context, in order to reach three types of conclusions: insights into Gregory's views about issues relevant to women, insights into the historical details of particular women whom Gregory mentioned, and insights into broader questions about the sixth-century West and beyond. It is only when Gregory's literary themes are put into a dialogue with his historical information that one can begin to discern such insights useful for reconstructions of the past.

It is in this way that an investigation into Gregory's views about widowhood, for example, can lead to conclusions about the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, the political circumstances of Visigothic Spain, and the nature of the Byzantine court. Gregory thought that the death of a husband presented a woman with an opportunity to shun the burdens of the world and pursue holiness with unobstructed piety. Some of the most praised individuals in Gregory's works are pious widows, such as Pelagia, who spent her widowhood in constant prayer and in support of monks. Likewise, some of Gregory's more notorious individuals are widows who struggled to remain politically relevant after their husbands' deaths. Queen Theudogild, for example, offered herself to King Guntram after she became a widow, only to be tricked out of

her wealth and forced into a monastery. Ironically, her love for the riches of this world caused her to languish miserably in the very place designed to help humbler women build up treasure in heaven. Gregory's moral theme influenced his presentation of Goiswinth as a wicked Arian persecutor of the Church, and of Sophia as a greedy rival to the righteous Tiberius. It may also have inspired his silence concerning Bertha's Christian influence in the pagan land of Kent. Even when faced with complex cases, such as the legacy of Chlothild, Gregory kept to his theme, carefully fashioning the queen's reputation for political agency and religious devotion into a story of redemption.

At first, it may seem surprising that Gregory had such precise opinions about widowhood, or that he allowed these to dictate large portions of his narrative. This particular interest may be explained, in part, by analysing Gregory's relationship with his own mother, who became a widow when he was still quite young. Gregory presented Armentaria as an exemplar of sanctity, and he did not shy from asserting that she had been his spiritual mentor, interpreting his visions and inspiring his virtue. Gregory admitted that he had not been worthy to see a miracle that had occurred during the feast of St. Polycarp, which his mother had witnessed. And, when he described the embarrassing story of how he had been tossed from his horse for bragging about his ability to work miracles with the family reliquary, Gregory confessed that he had succumbed to the sin of pride, unlike his mother, who had used the same relics to end an outbreak of fire on the family estates, without feeling the need to boast. In describing his mother, Gregory indulged in idealisation, omitting her involvement in more mundane, worldly pursuits, such as the management of her estates, the promotion of her sons' episcopal careers, or the resolution of family disputes. There is little doubt, however, that Armentaria was committed to living out her widowhood in devotion to God, and her piety clearly made an impression on Gregory, who judged the other widows of Gaul by her standard.

Gregory's moral message was not limited to the issue of widowhood, and at times he was willing to address more expressly political topics, especially when these dovetailed with issues of virtue, as was the case regarding royal marital habits. Gregory had experienced personally the civil wars in Gaul that had resulted from the instability within the Merovingian ruling house, and he viewed the problem,

fundamentally, as one of morality. In a general sense, the population of Gaul had brought such calamities upon itself through its own sinfulness. More particularly, however, the immoral and unintelligent marital practices of the Merovingian kings, who were driven by lust to marry a series of women, including even their slaves, and brought about the ruination of the kingdom. The problems of succession between fathers and sons, or inheritance between siblings, were exacerbated when the siblings were mere half-brothers, or the sons were the offspring of women who had later been divorced in favour of new brides. Gregory had no tolerance for conflicts that arose from such practices, and he even ventured to condemn the Visigothic prince Hermenegild for rebelling against his father, even though, in his understanding, Hermenegild had fought as a Catholic against an Arian tyrant. Gregory satirically recounted the marital practices of a number of Merovingian kings, from the whimsical decision of Chlothar to swap one lowborn woman for her sister, to the sacrilegious decision of Charibert to marry a nun, which earned him an excommunication. Even the positive example of King Sigibert, who stayed faithful to his royal bride, was tinged with tragedy, since Sigibert was killed by his half-brother in a dispute over territory.

Gregory's polemical theme on royal marital practice indicates broader views held within contemporary Gaul. One can assume that Gregory's opinions were representative of more widely held views, since he expected his message to find some resonance with his audience, and since his criteria for a worthy bride were based on ancient precedent and common sense. However, one can also discern opposing views, at least amongst the Merovingian kings and their supporters, who had good political reasons for favouring lowborn wives, and for exchanging one wife for another. Ease of dismissal had its advantages, and at times it became opportune for a king to replace a wife with a politically useful foreign princess. Similarly, Gregory unwittingly provided evidence that many of his episcopal colleagues consented to this marital policy, when he slandered certain bishops by acknowledging their acquiescence to royal behaviour. Many of these bishops, of course, owed their appointments to the consent of a particular king, and some of them were even related to the royal family, so their support for royal marital policy may have been based more on pragmatism than on principle. But Gregory himself owed his appointment as Bishop of Tours to the intervention of Radegund, a repudiated Merovingian queen, as well as to the

benevolence of King Sigibert and his wife Brunhild. Not only was Gregory's family well-connected to the Austrasian royal court, but Sigibert himself was remarkable for his sexual probity, thus giving Gregory's moral indignation at the infidelity of other kings a political hue of its own.

Once Gregory's theme of royal marital policy has been identified, it becomes possible to reassess certain interpretations of the Merovingian ruling house. It is a gross oversimplification, for example, to see the Merovingian kings as driven to irrational and politically disastrous behaviour through uncontrollable lust. Neither should they be seen as semi-pagan barbarians, practicing polygamy through an unembarrassed embrace of some ancient, Germanic institution. Merovingian courts were Christian courts, and the principal structure of marital relations was the concept of monogamy, even when this was applied in a manner that Gregory saw as less than ideal. Gregory's willingness to use ambiguous language to suggest that the practices of certain kings were so irresponsible as to border on polygamy ought not be taken as evidence of an alternative interpretation of marriage, and one might even doubt whether or not any king had taken more than one wife at the same time. Instead, these passages are best seen as evidence of Gregory's moral theme on royal marriage and its relationship with political stability within Gaul, as well as the literary tactics he used in order to shape his material into a narrative consistent with this agenda. Without discounting the role that lust may have played in certain royal decisions, or the possibility that some kings displayed their power by flaunting the rules of Christian society, it is important to judge Gregory's information critically, and to place it within a historical context understood in more complex terms.

Gregory's literary tactics were clearly on display in his presentation of Brunhild and Fredegund. Although the details of the careers of each queen were strikingly similar, Gregory used this to enhance his characterisation of the two as moral opposites by highlighting the different ways that each queen treated her servants, bishops, offspring, and so on. Gregory had nothing bad to say about Brunhild, unlike several other authors who wrote about her, and instead he accused Fredegund of a litany of crimes. After 584 Tours had fallen within Brunhild's increasingly-secure sphere of influence, and so it may be unsurprising that she was one of the few politically powerful women, and the only politically active widow, to have escaped his critique.

Moreover, Gregory clearly owed Brunhild something, since she had been involved in his appointment to his post in Tours, and since his connections to the Austrasian court ran deep. What is unexpected, however, is that this political loyalty did not translate into much overt praise – Brunhild only appears as a good queen in Gregory's works in comparison to Fredegund, even though some of Gregory's contemporaries were clearly willing to flatter the Austrasian queen overtly. In all likelihood, Gregory wished to justify his political support for Brunhild with the argument that, no matter how bad she might appear to some, she was unquestionably better than Fredegund.

It follows from this analysis that the historical Brunhild may have been rather more like the notorious woman known from the writings of Jonas of Bobbio and Fredegar than Gregory cared to admit. Unlike these later authors, however, Gregory wrote most of his *Historiae* during the time of Brunhild's ascendancy, and he put this work to its final revision in the years that she had unhindered influence over Tours. Scholarship has already identified Kings Chilperic and Guntram as two men who left their mark on the *Historiae* in a similar way, and so it may be necessary to add Brunhild to the list. It is revealing, therefore, that Gregory felt comfortable slandering Fredegund, accusing her of murder, sacrilege, witchcraft, treason, and the like. It follows that Fredegund never enjoyed the sort of influence in Gaul as Brunhild had, at least outside of Neustria, and she seems not to have recovered very quickly from the political disenfranchisement she suffered following the death of her husband in 584, after which she depended on King Guntram's protection. Further support for this interpretation is found in Gregory's reluctance to accuse Fredegund of adultery in the same candid manner that he did with her other offences. Unlike murder and sacrilege, the question of adultery was a threat to the king, since it called into question the legitimacy of the heir to the throne. Gregory had learnt just how dangerous it was to call Fredegund's fidelity into question in 580, when he was put on trial for allegedly murmuring that she was an adulteress. Even after this experience, however, he may not have been able to help himself from raising the accusation of adultery against the queen in his writings. Several passages subtly imply that her son, Chlothar II, was illegitimate, although in a manner that afforded Gregory the luxury of deniability.

Gregory's reserved treatment of Brunhild is consistent with his tendency not to place his hopes in the political leadership of Gaul, except in rare circumstance. Instead,

Gregory's admiration was reserved for those who pursued sanctity unhindered by worldly concerns. Consequently, he showed no hesitancy in praising those women who dedicated themselves to a life of holiness, and he clearly thought that sanctification was the ultimate goal of the faithful regardless of gender. Gregory did not shy from highlighting St. Eulalia's oversight of the liturgical celebrations of her own feast, or the ability of St. Geneviève to raise the dead. Of course, Gregory never questioned the fundamental authority of the exclusively male episcopate, but he made sure to indicate that women were able to attain the same heights of sanctity as men. Indeed, in his *vita* of the Monegund, for example, Gregory even gave an interpretation of salvation that hinged on the distinctly female figures of the Virgin Mary, the Mother Church, and the Queen of Sheba, which represented the Incarnation, the temporal life of believers, and the Eschaton, respectively. Again, one suspects that Gregory's mother, Armentaria, had played a key role in her son's understanding of sanctification and femininity.

This is not to suggest that Gregory viewed men and women as equivalent, and he wrote that, in winning salvation, Monegund had overcome the weaknesses of the female sex, resisting the temptations of the world with manly resolve. Yet he did not go so far as some Late Antique authors had done and suggest that the process of becoming holy was, for a woman, also a process of becoming male. Instead, Gregory viewed and femininity as possessing certain attributes that could be a hindrance, and so in some ways women found the straight path more difficult than men, but they were nonetheless able to live a righteous life, perhaps even to greater acclaim. Furthermore, although Gregory respected asceticism as a set of practices that helped the individual, male or female, to draw close to God, he never suggested that it allowed individuals to abandon their masculinity or femininity and become members of a third gender reserved only for the chaste. Instead, ascetics were still understood according to the social relations that applied to males and females, and chastity itself was a quality attainable even by the sexually active. Thus, it is perhaps best to speak of equity, rather than equality, when analysing the relationship between men, women, and holiness in Gregory's works. This may make Gregory a rather unusual thinker in Late Antiquity, since his views stand in contrast to those found in the works of Ambrose and Jerome, for example, but it may also suggest that current interpretations

of gender during the period are in need of some adjustment. Gregory was not one to engage in speculative theology, and so his opinions on such topics may be more representative of the widely held views of his day than the abstract theorising found in certain Patristic texts.

Asceticism had left its mark on Gaul in different ways. The areas lacing the Rhône River and the Mediterranean Sea were distinguished by an urbane and austere spirituality that had only a passing interest in miraculous relics, while the more central and western areas, influenced by Martinian monasticism, greatly emphasised the wondrous events that occurred within the shrines of the saints. As the practice of strict enclosure spread from the monasteries of the Provence and the Jura into the rest of Gaul, with ecclesiastical support, a problem arose for those who wished to enter the shrines in monasteries, when their gender did not correspond to that of the respective institution. Gregory lived during the peak of the problem, after the practice of enclosure had been affirmed by canonical legislation, but before architectural strategies of accommodation had been devised. His opinions on the matter are discernable through his decision to include several stories of women being cured at monastic shrines where, canonically, they were forbidden entry. It is difficult to interpret these accounts as anything other than an argument against strict adherence to the regulations. Clearly, God himself did not mind women accessing the relics of his saints within a monastic enclosure, or else he would not have looked so favourably on the infractors, as the woman who snuck in to see the pillar of Simeon Stylite had learnt all too well. This is not to suggest that Gregory encouraged disobedience toward the episcopate, since an important theme within his works was the need to submit to the authority of bishops. But the episcopate was not always united on all issues, and Gregory had other loyalties. His family had long promoted the cult of the saints, and they depended on the continued financial, political, and spiritual relevance of the shrines that were located on their estates.

There is no reason to be surprised by the claim that cultural differences in Gaul, and Gregory's own personal affiliations, influenced the content of his hagiographic works. It is only reasonable to expect that the religious landscape of the Merovingian kingdoms was as relevant for Gregory as the political landscape, especially considering the manner in which his pastoral and political obligations coexisted. Gregory's

principal concern with virtue applied to all spheres of life, and he used various literary strategies in order to demonstrate this in his works. Gregory's careful treatment of the miraculous is no less sophisticated than his incisive critique of politics, nor was he any more or less willing to manipulate his material in regards to one or the other. Gregory had to select his material carefully, so that he only included the evidence that he could interpret in a manner consistent with his overall literary themes, whether those were of a political or spiritual nature.

In a sense, this analysis can be seen as a criticism of Gregory as a historian, since it means that he subjected his material to a degree of manipulation that sometimes led to inaccuracy. Gregory himself anticipated such a critique, when he defended himself by appealing to a quotation from Sallust: 'To write history seems a difficult task, foremost because your accounts must be equivalent to the events, and secondly because most will think that your words of rebuke have derived from jealousy or ill-will.'[1] Gregory's defence of his methodology deserves to be taken seriously. Although it is possible to question his reconstruction of events, he can only rarely be accused of falsification or fabrication. Gregory was interested in presenting his audience with historical information, in a manner that they would accept, and he never deviated from this to an extent that might raise a serious amount of disbelief in his contemporary readership. It is perhaps best to see Gregory as composing narratives that communicated moral truths by appealing to the inherent meaning of historical events, sometimes at the expense of the precise details, especially when they were inconvenient to articulate for one reason or another. Indeed, the various literary tactics that Gregory employed can be understood as simply the means by which he overcame the restrictions placed on him as an author in order to present his audience with a lesson in virtue.

Thus, this analysis can also be seen as a tribute to Gregory as a pastor. Although writing and politics surely consumed much of Gregory's time, the bulk of his life was spent in religious duties, living out his vocation in ways no longer discernable. Gregory himself credited his decision to write to his mother, who urged him to publicise the miracles of St. Martin, in a simple style, so that the faithful would be

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[1] Hist. 4.13, 'Arduum videtur res gestas scribere: primum quod facta dictis exaequanda sunt; deinde quia plerique quae delecta repraehenderis malevolentia et invidia dicta putant.' This is from Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, ed. by Patrick McGushin (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1999), 3.2.

better able to recognise how close God was to the world of human affairs. Each of his works, including even the *Historiae*, is, in a sense, haunted by the afterlife – every event he narrated acquired its ultimate significance in light of the final judgement. If there is one great protagonist in the whole of Gregory's corpus, it is God himself. Gregory's views on the women in his works, therefore, can only be understood when analysed in the context of his greater themes on virtue and the path of righteousness. Queens, princesses, abbesses, nuns, senatorial women, and low-status women all faced the same fundamental choice between Heaven and Hell, and their worldly differences amounted simply to different challenges faced in the proving ground of this temporal life. Gregory's *Historiae* are, therefore, the product of his pastoral care, and not the unrelated pastime of an otherwise busy ecclesiastic. Any historical study interested in these worldly events must take into consideration Gregory's view on sanctity and its relationship with femininity, political agency, and the like. In this way, the women in the works of Gregory of Tours are a testament to the sixth-century bishop, his individuality, and his Gallic society.

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