

SOCIAL WORLDS OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Allen E. Jones

Death and Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours

Religion and Society
in Late Antique Gaul

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Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

The Late Antiquity experienced profound cultural and social change: the political disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, contrasted by its continuation and transformation in the East; the arrival of 'barbarian' newcomers and the establishment of new polities; a renewed militarization and Christianization of society; as well as crucial changes in Judaism and Christianity, together with the emergence of Islam and the end of classical paganism. This series focuses on the resulting diversity within Late Antique society, emphasizing cultural connections and exchanges; questions of unity and inclusion, alienation and conflict; and the processes of syncretism and change. By drawing upon a number of disciplines and approaches, this series sheds light on the cultural and social history of Late Antiquity and the greater Mediterranean world.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Abbreviations	9
Introduction	11

Part I Death

1. Peering into the Invisible World	25
Death and the Little Boy	26
Becoming Gregory I	36
Conclusion	49
2. Maturing Spiritually in a Perilous World	53
Death and the Aspiring Cleric	53
Becoming Gregory II	66
<i>Studium ad ecclesiastica scripta</i>	76
Conclusion	87
3. Pastoring from the Pulpit and the Page	89
Death and the Bishop	89
Death and the Historian?	100
Bishop, Author, Pastor	111
Writings and Sermons	112
Sin, Penance, Grace	114
Living Holy People	124
Sinners	133
Conclusion	140

Part II Afterlife

4. Discerning the Denizens of Heaven and Hell	145
The Saved	146
Visionaries and Heaven	151
Communicating Salvation: <i>Migrare</i> and <i>Transire</i>	153
Hellmates	157
Signs of Condemnation	166



Communicating Damnation: <i>Interire, Iudicium Dei, Ultio Divina</i>	172
Lessons and Warnings for Contemporaries	182
Conclusion	195
5. Fathoming the Fates of the Merovingians	201
Merovingians in Heaven	205
King Clovis and Queen Clotild	207
King Theudebert	224
Merovingians in Hell	230
King Chlodomer	230
A Mixed Bag: Kings Theuderic, Theudebald, Childebert I, Chlothar I and Prince Chramn	234
Kings Charibert and Sigibert	245
Kings Chilperic and Guntram	255
Conclusion	272
6. Conclusion	275
Killer Queen(s)	277
King Guntram and Gregory's Unfinished Project	285
Afterword	292
Bibliography	297
Primary Sources	297
Secondary Works	299
Index	315



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While oft tucked away in my school office or at home in the sunroom, head buried in a book or a laptop, my thoughts frequently have blurred between Gregory's saints and relatives and my own beloved friends and family members. I dedicate this book to my family, especially to Patty and Mom, and to the memory of my father, Allen Sr.



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Abbreviations

- ACW* *Ancient Christian Writers*
- CCSL* *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*
- CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
- CSR* Gregory of Tours, *De cursu stellarum ratio*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 404-422.
- GC* Gregory of Tours, *De gloria confessorum*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 284-370.
- GM* Gregory of Tours, *De gloria martyrum*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 34-111.
- Historiae* Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, in Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (eds.), *MGH SRM 1.1* (Hanover: Hahn, 1951), 1-537.
- LCL* *Loeb Classical Library*
- MA* Gregory of Tours, *De miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli*, ed. by Max Bonnet, *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 171-96.
- MGH* *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- AA** Auctores Antiquissimi
- SS** Scriptores
- SRM** Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
- 1.1** *MGH SRM 1.1*, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison (Hanover: Hahn, 1951).
- 1.2** *MGH SRM 1.2*, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1951).
- 2** *MGH SRM 2*, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1888).
- 3** *MGH SRM 3*, ed. by Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1896).
- PL* J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Garnier, 1844-1865).
- PLRE 2* John Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- PLRE 3* John Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3 A-B (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- PSD* Gregory of Tours, *Passio sanctorum martyrum septem dormientium apud Ephesum*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 397-403.
- PT* Gregory of Tours, *In Psalterii tractatum commentarius*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM 1.2* (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 423-27; Pierre



Salmon (ed.), *Les "Tituli Psalmorum" des manuscrits latins*,
Collectanea Biblica Latini, vol. 12 (Rome: Abbaye Saint-Jérôme,
1959), 138-48.

SC *Sources Chrétiennes*

TTH *Translated Texts for Historians*

VP Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum*, in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM*
1.2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 211-83.

VSJ Gregory of Tours, *De passione et de virtutibus S. Iuliani martyris*,
in Bruno Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM* 1.2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 112-
34.

VSM Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus S. Martini episcopi*, in Bruno
Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM* 1.2 (Hanover: Hahn, 1969), 134-211.



Introduction

Gregory of Tours was a southern Gallic aristocrat (born c. 538) turned bishop of Tours (573-594) whose diocese rested precariously along one of the Frankish kingdoms' shifting frontiers.¹ He was a prolific writer whose surviving corpus includes ten books of history, ten books about saints and their miracles, a book for calculating times for evening prayers, and a commentary on the psalms.² In part because Gregory's writings are so voluminous and terribly significant for understanding the era – the *Historiae* are essential to any reconstruction of a sixth-century Gallic political narrative –, scholars frequently have aligned their thoughts about the author with their estimations on the condition of the society in which he lived. Prior to the late twentieth century, researchers turned to the *Historiae* far more than to the *Miracula* in order to gather evidence about Gregory's world. They took the bishop's many humble references to his literary shortcomings literally and accepted the *Historiae's* many depictions of murder and mayhem as

1 During Gregory's episcopacy Tours was ruled by a succession of four kings who governed three different Frankish sub-kingdoms. Sigibert, king of Austrasia (the north-easternmost realm), appointed Gregory as bishop in 573 and held Tours up to the ruler's assassination in late 575. Chilperic, king of Neustria (the north-westernmost realm), controlled Tours until his assassination in mid-584. Guntram, king of Burgundy (the south-eastern realm), held Tours for about a year until he turned it over to Sigibert's son. Childebert II, king of Austrasia, presided over Tours beyond Gregory's death in 594 until the king's premature demise in 596.

On the Merovingian kingdoms: Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*; Hartmann, *Die Merowinger*; eadem, *Aufbruch ins Mittelalter*; James, *The Franks*; Ewig, *Die Merowinger*; Geary, *Before France and Germany*; Murray, "Merovingian State"; Esders, "Gallic Politics." On bishops: Heinzlmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*; Jussen, "Über 'Bischofsherrschaft'"; Scheibelreiter, *Der Bischof in merowinger Zeit*; Moore, *Sacred Kingdom*; Halfond, *Bishops and the Politics of Patronage*; Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*; Pietri, *La ville de Tours*, 293-302.

2 Gregory provided two incomplete lists of his writings at *Historiae* 10.31 and GC preface, both of which mention the *Decem libri historiarum* (hereafter, *Historiae*). The hagiographical books he listed are the *Libri quattuor de virtutibus Sancti Martini episcopi* (hereafter, *VSM*), *Liber de passione et virtutibus Sancti Iuliani* (*VSJ*), *Liber de gloria confessorum* (*GC*), *Liber de gloria martyrum* (*GM*) and *Liber de vita patrum* (*VP*). Also listed are the *De cursu stellarum ratio* (*CSR*) and *In Psalterii tractatum commentarius* (*PT*). Not included in those lists are two paraphrased *vitae*, the *Passio sanctorum martyrum septem dormientium apud Ephesum* (*PSD*) and *Liber de miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli* (*MA*). Two more works Gregory did not cite in the lists are a pair of introductions for collections he compiled, one on the masses of Sidonius Apollinaris and the other a selection of Christian poets. Neither of these are extant. Gregory undoubtedly wrote numerous letters and sermons, all of which are lost. All references to Gregory's Latin text are, for the *Historiae*, Krusch and Levison, ed., *MGH*, SRM 1.1 and for all else, Krusch, ed., *MGH*, SRM 1.2.



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simple reflections of barbarous times. As a result scholars built a virtual consensus which labelled Gregory an incompetent writer, an untalented spokesperson for a “dark age” – a casualty of his own credulous and violent era –, a gullible believer in saints and miracles, and a historian ill prepared for the task which he alone undertook in sixth-century Gaul, to write a “history of the Franks.”³

Dismantlement of this former near-consensus began in earnest during the 1970s with the work of two stalwarts, Peter Brown and Walter Goffart. Brown helped rescue “Gregorian studies” from the traditional position by folding analysis of the Gallic author’s writings into a revolutionary reevaluation of hagiography of his own making whereby saints’ lives become valuable sources for scholars of late ancient societies.⁴ Specifically Brown dismissed earlier imaginings of Gregory as a practitioner of a naïve brand of Christianity, and instead assigned to him a persona that today’s scholars uniformly regard as one of the bishop’s most essential guises, an adept participant in the cult of saints.⁵ Equally momentous was Walter Goffart’s endeavor which thoroughly debunked a prevailing image of Gregory as author of a nationalistically attuned history.⁶ Goffart exposed how Gregory did not compose a “history of the Franks”; rather, he wrote ten books of *Historiae*, the contents of which moralize to its audience as they alternate between political and religious themes.⁷

3 A barbarous writer reflecting the age: e. g., Ampère, *Histoire littéraire*, 2: 275-314; Bonnet, *Le Latin de Grégoire*, 76-85. To be sure there were dissenting opinions on Gregory’s talents stretching back to the earliest analyses of his corpus and running into the twentieth century. E. g., Thierry Ruinart positively assessed Gregory’s theology in 1699; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 3. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 85-89, in the mid-twentieth century appreciated Gregory’s technique for scenic narrative. For valuable overviews of the early literature: de Nie, *Views*, 1-22; Goffart, *Narrators*, 112-27; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 1-6; Breukelaar, *Historiography*, 14-21; Vollmann, “Gregor IV.”

4 Brown, *Society and the Holy*; idem, *Cult of the Saints*; idem, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 155-65.

5 Brown added Gregory to his program of “making late antiquity” at Reading’s Stenton Lectures in 1976; Brown, “Relics and Social Status.” About Brown’s centrality in stimulating a lasting scholarly fascination for Gregory’s hagiography, Danuta Shanzer, “So Many Saints,” 21, writes “[A]ll that was needed was one break, one influential reader to open the musty pages of an MGH volume. In 1977, the *Libri Miraculorum* found him – in Peter Brown.” Alternatively, de Nie, *Views*, 9, identified Auerbach’s 1946 monograph as the watershed publication for letting go traditional approaches and reevaluating Gregory. Felice Lifshitz, “Apostolicity Theses,” 217, pinpointed a new direction for grasping the writer starting with Felix Thurlemann’s 1974 monograph, which popularized Gregory’s “deliberate discursive strategy.”

6 A late example in the latter vein is Verdon, *Grégoire de Tours*.

7 Goffart, “From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum*,” idem, *Narrators*.



A broad-ranging scholarly reevaluation of Gregory from the last two decades of the twentieth century to present has produced findings markedly different from what many thought about the bishop in days of old. Studies by researchers devoted to providing more sharply defined impressions about certain aspects of the figure have resulted in new and influential identities, prominent among which are Giselle de Nie's intellectually capable communicator, Ian Wood's insider to the Frankish political world, Raymond Van Dam's religiously sensitive client of the saints, and Martin Heinzelmänn's theologically sophisticated historiographer.⁸ Of further benefit to advancing knowledge about Gregory and his society have been efforts to analyze particular themes germane to the writer and his contemporaries. Notable monograph submissions include Isabel Moreira on dreams and visions, Lisa Bailey on religious practices among the laity, John Kitchen on gender in hagiography, Erin Dailey on elite women, and members of

8 De Nie, on the heels of Brown's cultural-anthropologically inspired reevaluation of Gregory as devotee of the saints, offered psychologically derived analyses of the bishop's motives; she got deep into Gregory's head. De Nie identified longstanding errant assumptions about Gregory's "naivety" and "simplicity" to be "an intellectualistic illusion of modern historians"; de Nie, *Views*, 26. By seeking to tease out the author's mental and verbal patterns built upon non-discursive but comprehensible imaginings, she enhanced the process of reestablishing Gregory's reputation as a communicator, thereby greatly improving subsequent scholarly attempts to interrelate with the subject; *ibid.*, *Views*, 2. See also eadem, *Word, Image and Experience*. Both works include previously published articles, some with minor revision. Ian Wood has drawn attention to how partisanship and involvement in the power politics of Merovingian courts impacted Gregory's text. Wood's scholarship has called attention to the need for scholars to take heed of the writer's seemingly straight-forward literary presentations. Because Gaul's political atmosphere was fraught with peril, the bishop was not always at liberty to write openly. Thus, one may have to read between the lines to ascertain Gregory's message; Wood, "Secret Histories"; *idem*, "Individuality." Wood's insights on the alignment of Gregory's cultic activities with his familial interests is crucial; see Wood, "Ecclesiastical Politics"; *idem*, "Topographies of Holy Power."

Raymond Van Dam has elaborated on Gregory's motives and methods for building the special relationships he did with multiple saintly patrons while showing marked differences among the latter. Van Dam has firmly established how Gregory's cultic interactions with the saints, especially those with the martyr Julian of Brioude and the famed confessor Martin of Tours, were deeply personal, heartfelt endeavors; Van Dam, *Saints*; *idem*, *Leadership and Community*, 179-300.

Martin Heinzelmänn has resuscitated Gregory's reputation in terms of both his historiographical and theological capabilities. His insights have stripped away all credibility for theories that perceive the bishop of Tours as an artless recorder of dark-age mishaps. Specifically, Heinzelmänn has presented Gregory as a deft theologian whose historical writings constitute a pointedly Christocentric work evincing "theology in action" with bishops and kings each playing roles as principal characters and intended audience; Heinzelmänn, *Gregor von Tours*; *idem*, *Gregory of Tours* (English translation of the former).



amicitia networks among other letter writers.⁹ Now that we are fully four decades into the current program for reassessing Gregory and his world, one may argue that a new near-consensus regarding the writer has emerged. This may be evidenced by the appearance of two massive compendia dedicated expressly to the bishop of Tours.¹⁰ Contributors to these tomes seem to concur in acknowledging that Gregory was an avid and expert promoter of saints' cults, an ecclesiastic fully enmeshed in the politics of his day, an accomplished hagiographer, and a talented historian capable of embedding sophisticated theological messages into a work of history. Just as scholars once offered derisive estimations about Gregory's society in tandem with their low estimations of the writer, many now match their "new and improved" Gregories with assertions that early Merovingian Gaul must have possessed a thriving literary culture capable of producing such a talented individual.¹¹

However, despite researchers now sharing in a recognition of Gregory's talents and capabilities, many debates about the writer, his social contemporaries, and Gallic society in general persist.¹² For example, ascertaining Gregory's "true feelings" about contemporary Merovingians such as Kings Chilperic and Guntram is a pastime that continues to generate spirited argumentation.¹³ Additionally, the issue of determining the extent to which Gregory's thoughts and actions were representative of his society, or even figuring out how to do that, ever haunts.¹⁴ Also potentially problematic is the

9 Moreira, *Dreams, Visions*; Bailey, *Religious Worlds*; Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*; Tyrrell, *Merovingian Letters*. Jones, *Social Mobility*, hopefully is useful if occasionally rough around the edges. Three authors whose scattered contributions in journal articles and book chapters are thought provoking and, I think, mandatory for anyone studying Gregory's era are Guy Halsall, Danuta Shanzer, and Alexander Murray: Halsall, "Nero and Herod?"; idem, "Preface to Book V"; Shanzer, "History, Romance, Love, and Sex"; eadem, "Laughter and Humour"; eadem, "So Many Saints"; eadem, "Gregory of Tours and Poetry"; Murray, "Chronology"; idem, "Composition."

10 Mitchell and Wood, eds., *World of Gregory of Tours*; Murray, ed., *Gregory of Tours*. See also a recent collected edition in which Gregory is a feature source for most of the articles; Esders, Hen, Lucas and Rotman, eds., *Merovingian Kingdoms*.

11 Hen, *Culture and Religion*; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 20-32.

12 A simple perusal of the articles contained in either of the two aforementioned compendia attests to this. It will become obvious within that I question Heinzelmänn's recent emphasis on a dominant Augustinian influence upon Gregory's writings.

13 Murray, "Composition," 69, writes: "Attention to the current literature of the subject reveals, however, that there is hardly agreement at all regarding even elementary conclusions about Gregory's attitudes to contemporary politics." Specifically, compare, e. g., Wood, "Secret Histories"; Halsall, "Nero and Herod?"; Murray, "Composition," 75-76.

14 See especially, Wood, "Individuality."



conundrum that the more scholars realize how Gregory was a sophisticated litterateur who shaped his text, the more one is required to question whether it is possible to regard information gathered from his pages as reliable for understanding particular aspects of Gallic society.¹⁵

We have seen already how a longstanding deep-seated belief in a Gallic “dark age” rested in some measure on an equally enduring misreading of Gregory’s literary capabilities. Although these traditional views have been overturned, a general maxim still applies: to continue advancing towards a more accurate understanding of late ancient Gallic society as a whole, it is necessary to get Gregory right. One component of the novel near-consensus on the writer that I believe deserves more scrutiny than it has received is the image of Gregory as theologian. Most who study late ancient Gaul would agree, I think, that Martin Heinzelmann has almost single-handedly carried the day in directing this concept for over thirty years. And while no one will argue that his decades of scholarly findings have proven brilliant, influential, and thought-provoking as a whole, it appears that of late the researcher has become increasingly convinced that not only Gregory’s theology, but even his very program of composition, owes to the author’s reliance on Augustine of Hippo’s writings.¹⁶ I will have occasion during the course of this book to challenge various elements for several of Heinzelmann’s theories. For

15 Social historians continue to rise to the challenge of defending the use of Gregory’s text to illuminate society. For example, it is clear how Gregory commonly fashioned his portrayal of certain individuals to make them reflect a particular moral theme. As Erin Dailey points out, however, this rarely prohibits one from drawing some conclusion about a facet of the bishop’s society. Consider, for example, Gregory’s scattered mentions of his own mother, Armentaria. When examining these one needs be conscious of how Gregory selectively privileged scenes that accentuated the woman acting as a pious Christian. But keeping this caveat in mind does not prevent one from assessing valuable facts such as where Armentaria lived after her husband died. Nor does it stop one from ascertaining a significant perspective Gregory held about his society, in this instance how he thought women ideally should conduct themselves after their spouses’ decease. For Gregory’s mother and his ideals about widowhood: Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*, 16–45.

16 Compare Heinzelmann’s non-committal remarks on Augustinian influences at *Gregory of Tours* with those from his “Works of Gregory.” In the former Heinzelmann writes: “There can be no doubt, without wanting (or being able) to postulate a direct dependence of Gregory on Augustine ..., that the bishop of Tours had understood and adhered to the principles of history expressed by Augustine”; *Gregory of Tours*, 151. In a section of the later article entitled “The Design of the Entire Corpus: Eusebius and Augustine’s City of God as Models” Heinzelmann declares that Gregory’s work owed more to Augustine than to Eusebius; “Works of Gregory,” 284, 287. To be clear, I am not entirely dismissing the possibility of Augustinian influences on Gregory. Speculations about the latter borrowing from the bishop of Hippo are nothing new: e. g., Krusch and Levison, eds., *MGH, SRM* 1.1, 7–8; de Nie, *Views*, 75; *Word, Image and Experience*, XVII; Carozzi, “Le Clovis de Grégoire,” 182–84.

now, I simply will indicate my alternative concept: Gregory's corpus is not the result of Gregory's encounter with Augustinian literary musings; rather, it is a literary effort borne out of a gradual process of an individual seeking to give meaning to a lifetime of experiences in Gallic society. More specifically I propose to show how Gregory developed a sound, practical theology, which underpins his hagiographical and historical writings. This practical theology had its roots in Gregory's earliest years; it developed by virtue of successive encounters with influential individuals including parents, the pious, aristocratic power couple, Armentaria and Florentius; ecclesiastical relations such as Bishops Gallus of Clermont and Tetricus of Langres; Gregory's tutor, Avitus of Clermont; and visionaries like Sunniulf of Randau, Salvius of Albi, and Aredius of Limoges.

I propose to lay out my case for Gregory and his friends in the guise of an examination on a theme which gets to the heart of the bishop's writings, death and afterlife.¹⁷ This book will consider how death acted as a catalyst for Gregory conducting his pastoral work, initiating his writing program, and imagining a Christian afterlife according to his own fashion. Drawing on material from the bishop's entire corpus, the book will venture to provide nuanced assessments for Gregory's thoughts about numerous characters depicted dying in his text.¹⁸ I will have reason to regularly appeal to literary evidence from Gregory's near and actual contemporaries, particularly

17 Incidentally, and rather ironically, it was Heinzemann's several brief references to Gregory using certain words to comment on the fates of particular individuals depicted dying in the *Historiae* which compelled me to start examining what if anything the bishop thought about people's afterlives. It seems only appropriate that irony should play its part in a work about a writer who really appreciated the concept, and used it to great effect in his pages.

Research on death and afterlife in late ancient societies has mushroomed in recent decades. For works on the topic, including several that take the writings of Gregory and his fellow Gauls into account: Harries, "Death and the Dead"; Amat, *Songes et Visions*; Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*; idem, *Hell and Its Rivals*; Bremmer, "Christian Hell"; idem, *Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*; Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*; Bynum, *Resurrection of the Dead*; Bynum and Freedman, eds., *Last Things*; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme*; Effros, *Caring for Body and Soul*; Handley, *Death, Society, and Culture*; Moreira, *Heaven's Purge*; Paxton, *Christianizing Death*; Rebillard, *In hora mortis*; Russell, *History of Heaven*; Sicard, *La liturgie de la mort*; Moreira and Toscano, eds., *Hell and Afterlife*.

18 This study draws as much from Gregory's *Miracula* as from the *Historiae*. Scholarly usage of hagiography has revolutionized late ancient studies in recent decades. Gallic hagiographers differed widely in the degree of biographical material they opted to include when composing stories about holy exemplars. But as John Kitchen has indicated, Gregory, as it turns out, retained more biographical data for depictions of individual saints in his *vitae* than did others, such as his contemporary and friend, Venantius Fortunatus; Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 94. Gregory's relatively authentic approach in this matter is a fortuitous happenstance for historians investigating Gallic society.

Venantius Fortunatus, for context. I should stress up front that some part of this book will involve an unabashed element of what some may characterize as “intellectual biography.”¹⁹

Because Gregory decided to write in large measure to persuade readers to abandon their sinful ways, he needed to be able to reach his audience.²⁰ Relatability, therefore, was of utmost importance. This is evidenced in the author’s choice for his basic mode of communicating, to utilize the Latin vernacular of the day in an accessible prose.²¹ Gregory’s ultimate intended audience for his corpus was wide, including clerics and laity, rich and poor, men and women.²² Despite abundant use of the humility topos, by which Gregory confessed to a faulty education and worried whether he was adequate to the task of rendering in writing the glories of saintly miracles, there was in fact no segment of society the author did not hope to reach.²³ Acknowledging that Gregory was a confident litterateur capable of influencing a broad audience makes sense in light of recent scholarly characterizations of Gallic society that have dispensed with past, overly bifurcated imaginings of distinct cultures, such as elite and commoner, pagan and Christian, and Roman and barbarian.

Late ancient society was not separated into two social tiers.²⁴ The commonality of social experiences for the rich and poor is evidenced by people’s

On Gallic/Merovingian hagiography: e. g., Beaujard, *Le culte des saints*; Corbett, “Hagiography and the Experience”; Fouracre, “Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography”; Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger*; Heinzelmann, “L’hagiographie au service de l’histoire”; idem, “Der Funktion des Wunders”; idem, “Une source de base”; Goulet, Heinzelmann, and Veyrard-Cosme, eds., *L’hagiographie mérovingienne*; Poulin, *L’hagiographie bretonne*; Kreiner, *Social Life of Hagiography*. On hagiography and methodology: Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre”; Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity*, 25-74; Pratsch, “Exploring the Jungle.”

19 For a critique of intellectual biographies on Gregory: Murray, “Composition,” 74-77.

20 On edification in Gregory’s works: Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 172-81.

21 Beumann, “Gregor von Tours,” 81-89; Hen, *Roman Barbarians*, 6-10; Wright, “Columbanus’s Epistulae,” 32-39.

22 In the *Historiae* Gregory directly referenced, e. g., bishops: *Historiae* 10.31; kings: *Historiae* 5 prologue. The lessons of certain *vitae* of *VP* appear especially germane for practicing ascetics: e. g., *VP* 1, 15, 20. Others seem to be intended for audiences at saints’ basilicas.

23 Gregory expected passages from the *Miracula* to be read before congregants at church services. For common people listening to Gregory’s miracle stories: Van Dam, “Images of Saint Martin,” 12-13. On audiences for hagiography: Van Uytfangehe, “L’audience de l’hagiographie”; idem, “L’hagiographie et son public.” Like nearly all other forms of early Christian writing, Gregory’s text has a communicative function; it would have been comprehensible to a broad segment of society. This implies that such works can be used to understand the audience’s religious experiences. See Bailey, *Religious Worlds*, 8-10.

24 Van Dam, “Images of Saint Martin,” 16-18; Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 18-20; Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 12-22. Gregory’s was not a world wherein society’s elites exclusively dwelt on theology.

strategies to better their lot in life. For example, while Gallic elites improved and maintained their social station by acquiring secular offices in the regimes of kings, so too did individual, ambitious non-elites like Gregory's primary local nemesis, Count Leudast, who used his proximity to a royal court to climb from kitchen slave to count of Tours.²⁵ Likewise, just as some Gallic aristocrats, members of Gregory's family among them, aspired to the post of bishop to take leadership of their Christian communities and control the properties and funds churches were increasingly amassing, so too did numerous free (*ingenui*) and poor people (*pauperes*) jockey to fill many positions as low level clerics and thereby climb the ecclesiastical *cursus honorum*.²⁶

Merovingian Gaul did not consist of two evenly distributed religions. By the late sixth century, Gaul was a fundamentally Christian world.²⁷ Unlike the literary models Gregory relied upon, such as Scripture, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini* and Orosius's history, all of which denounced once socially prevalent paganisms, the bishop of Tours squarely set his sights on heretics and Jews as the only viable optional confessions remaining to confront orthodoxy.²⁸ Another potentially viable threat Gregory perceived were doubters within the orthodox camp. For example, in the last book of the *Historiae* the writer depicted himself having to defend the doctrine of bodily resurrection against one of his own priests!²⁹

Finally, Romans and barbarians are another category of peoples once perceived as drastically different whom today's scholars no longer view as groups foreign to one another by the sixth century. Gregory acknowledged

Neither was reverence for saints and relics a hallmark of popular religion that elites looked on with disdain. The practice among Gallic aristocrats of incorporating saints' cults into their efforts to control local ecclesiastical structures was already alive and well by the fifth century: Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*.

On the cult of saints: Beaujard, *Le culte des saints*; Brown, *Society and the Holy*; idem, *Cult of the Saints*; idem, "Enjoying the Saints"; Corbett, "Saint as Patron"; idem, "Praesentium signorum munera"; de Nie, *Poetics of Wonder*; Delehay, *Sanctus: Essai sur le cultes*; Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger*; Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 82-120; Mitchell, "Saints and Public Christianity"; Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*; idem, *Saints*.

25 *Historiae* 5.48; Jones, *Social Mobility*, 105-14.

26 *Ibid.*, 129-79. On the society's many low-level church-affiliated individuals who were neither ordained nor consecrated: Bailey, "Within and Without."

27 Hen, *Culture and Religion*, 154-206; idem, "Church in Sixth-Century Gaul," 234-37. Gaul's bishops only perceived lingering pagan practices as a threat in the late sixth century, not actual devotees to pagan gods; idem, "Paganism and Superstitions."

28 For Gregory's written approaches to heretics and Jews: Keely, "Arians and Jews."

29 *Historiae* 10.13. Also common to the society were skeptics of saints: Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger*, 451-55.



his own stock as “Roman” even while he realized full well that the western Empire disappeared in the previous century.³⁰ Late ancient societal changes in the west including the shift in political loyalties from imperial to barbarian royal families and also increased militarization among elites fostered conscious changes of ethnic identity among numerous individuals.³¹ For example, while Gregory like many fellow southern Gallic aristocrats opted to continue accentuating descent from relatives bearing Roman senatorial status, his mother’s uncle, who took the name Gundulf, participated in a trend among certain Gallic elites of adopting their kings’ ethnicity. Ample evidence from Gregory and Fortunatus’s corpuses confirms that Gallic high ecclesiastics and Frankish kings after two-hundred years of regular interaction had developed a relationship in which each relied on support of the other.³² As for the kings, with whose courts the author was very familiar, they espoused an inclusive position that regardless of the multiplicity of identities the inhabitants of Gaul continued to profess, all were welcomed under the Merovingian family’s tent.³³ As Edward James has illustrated, Gregory rarely referred to individuals as Franks, less so as his narrative approached contemporary events.³⁴ This is because it was not Gregory’s priority to imagine his audience through an ethnic lens as Romans and barbarians; rather, it was his goal to fortify the faithful and reprove sinners, to usher souls to heaven and help them evade eternal torments in hell.³⁵

30 Gregory identified elite persons of Roman ethnicity in Gaul by their native cities and families. While he did not distinguish contemporaries as “Roman” and “barbarian,” his friend Venantius Fortunatus did. For the two writers’ contrasting uses of ethnicity: Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities*, 107-46. Gregory and Fortunatus were similar, however, in how they rarely used the term *franci*, and both, each for his own literary purpose, avoided reference to the distant Frankish past; Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 88-97. Gregory did not regard contemporary Byzantines as heirs to the “Romans.” On Gregory and the Byzantines: Loseby, “Gregory of Tours.”

31 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 488-97. Before serving as a duke under Childebert II contemporaneously to his great-nephew’s tenure as bishop of Tours, Gundulf acted as a *domesticus* for the Austrasian court. He probably assumed the name upon entering the court; *ibid.*, 469. Alternatively, perhaps he adopted it even earlier in association with a prior military position for which we have no evidence.

32 Moore, *Sacred Kingdom*; Halfond, “All the King’s Men.”

33 Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities*, 182-86.

34 James, “Gregory of Tours,” 56-59.

35 E. g., *VSJ* 13. Significantly, Helmut Reimitz recently has elaborated how Gregory’s was a new kind of ecclesiastical history that devalued Roman history as well as Frankish history and identity in order to accentuate the centrality of God’s *regnum*. Divorced from matters of ethnicity, “in Gregory’s radical vision, individual striving for the kingdom of God was the only decisive criterion for belonging to [his Christian] community”; Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 27-123, quoted at 122.



Breakdown of Chapters

This book is divided into two parts, I) Death, and II) Afterlife. The first section addresses the impact death had on Gregory from birth up to the crucial first years of his episcopacy, during which time he began writing the books that survive today. Part I illustrates how the distinctive pastoral underpinning of Gregory's writings resulted as much from the individual's upbringing and societal encounters as from readings of patristic literature, perhaps even more so. Each of the three chapters in Part I opens with a narrative that personifies Death (with a capital "D"). Chapter 1 reviews approximately the first eleven years of Gregory's life, up to the point when the boy endured a nearly fatal fever and vowed to become a cleric. The chapter considers how Gregory's parents, Armentaria and Florentius, along with his paternal uncle Gallus, bishop of Clermont, instilled in the youth the basics of acknowledging and trusting the saints. It was as a boy being reared in a lay household that Gregory began learning techniques for drawing on invisible holy powers in order to overcome difficult and even potentially deadly predicaments. Chapter 2 traces Gregory's early career up to the eve of him becoming a bishop. During these years, relatives, especially those from Gregory's maternal line, helped him further his skills for deciphering hidden mysteries and taught him to master aspects of the cult of saints which would benefit him in a society beset with sporadic dangers, not the least of which was ecclesiastical factionalism. This chapter also addresses how the cleric pursued a program of ecclesiastical studies which complemented and strengthened his effort to unearth invisible truths which lay hidden behind various this-worldly phenomena. Chapter 3 addresses how Gregory as a new bishop of Tours was just beginning to put into writing the miracles performed by that city's patron, Saint Martin, when his diocese was suddenly engulfed in one of the worst extended periods of violence in Merovingian history. It will be argued in this chapter that the concentrated death and destruction Gregory witnessed over four years compelled him to decide to complement his hagiography with history.³⁶ The chapter will investigate how Gregory promoted a distinctive, theologically consistent, saint-centered pastoral agenda in all of his writings. He encouraged readers and congregants to expiate their sins by confidently invoking saintly support and by developing a perfect faith. Gregory believed that all martyrs and confessors act as conduits for God's salvific power.

36 This argument in certain respects parallels that of Halsall, "Preface to Book V."



Part II focuses on the bishop's pastoral effort to save readers' souls by memorializing holy and wretched individuals. Gregory filled his books with moralizing messages imparted through images of people behaving piously or wickedly (or both) and then expiring in myriad ways. Chapter 4 briefly addresses how Gregory depicted saints and other righteous persons going to heaven. More space is spent considering how the writer interpreted evidence to ascertain the eternal loss of wicked people's souls. The chapter details how Gregory employed a deliberate vocabulary borrowed from his literary models to communicate to readers his own estimations about the salvation and condemnation of individuals' souls. Uncovering the invisible truth about people's eternal fates was a significant aspect of Gregory's theology and pastoral agenda. Analysis of his writings about afterlife reveals the author's belief in particular judgment, a form of judgment that people incurred immediately upon their decease. It shows how Gregory intended readers to examine the details he provided of certain individuals' behaviors, their demises, and signs associated with their deaths to participate in a deductive process similar to that which he already underwent in real time and to share his conclusions about characters' hereafters. The chapter establishes how Gregory was novel for his era in exhibiting a willingness to stigmatize in writing the condemnation of many peoples' souls. Chapter 5 deals with a subset of souls whose heavenly and infernal condition Gregory pondered, the Merovingians. The extensiveness of material about royal family members provides ample evidence to enable one to grasp how Gregory sought to deduce the eternal fates of some of the society's most prominent individuals. This chapter contributes to several lasting debates about Gregory's "true" thoughts about particular kings. Were Gregory's depictions of Clovis murdering his own relations intended to provide satirical examples of bad versus worse? Did Gregory imagine that the king who appointed him as bishop of Tours lost his soul? Did he really think Chilperic was a new Herod and Nero? The book ends by considering several matters left unattended to by virtue of Gregory dying prior to completing most of his books. In Chapter 6 it is argued that the author probably was far from finished writing when he expired. The chapter addresses what Gregory may have had in mind to record about Queens Fredegund and Brunhild and King Guntram in *Historiae* 10. The chapter concludes with a few brief suggested directions for subsequent research on the bishop of Tours.