

SOCIAL WORLDS OF LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Tamar Rotman

# Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul

## Rethinking Gregory of Tours

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Hagiography, Historiography,  
and Identity in Sixth Century 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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# Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth Century Gaul

*Rethinking Gregory of Tours*

*Tamar Rotman*

Amsterdam University Press



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# List of Abbreviations

AASS	Acta Sanctorum
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1909)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i> (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1898–1899)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
EH	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>The Ecclesiastical History</i> , vol. 1 (Books I–V), ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926, reprint 1975)
GC	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Liber in Gloria Confessorum</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 284–370
GM	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Liber in Gloria Martyrum</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 34–111
LH	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Decem Libri Historiarum</i> , eds. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH SRM. 1.1 (Hannover, 1937)
MGH	Monumenta Germanae Historica
AA	Auctores antiquissimi
SRM	Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum
MH	<i>Martyrologium Hieronymianum</i> , ed. Hippolyte Delehaye, AASS, Novembris II (Brussels, 1894)
SD	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Passio sanctorum Septem dormientium apud Ephesum</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 396–403
VP	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Liber Vitae Patrum</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM. 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 211–283
VSJ	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Liber de Passione et Virtutibus Sancti Iuliani martyris</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 112–133
VSM	Gregorius Turonensis, <i>Libri I–IV de Virtutibus Sancti Martini Episcopi</i> , ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 1.2 (Hannover, 1885), pp. 134–211







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A great many things keep happening – some are good, some are bad.

Gregory of Tours, *Ten Books of Histories*

It is shameful for a foolish, fraudulent, ignorant, and unskilled man to undertake what he cannot accomplish, but what can I do?

Gregory of Tours, *The Glory of the Confessors*



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# Introduction

So you, too, if you manfully, not tepidly, place the sign of salvation on your forehead or in your heart and resist sins, you will be made a martyr, for the martyrs themselves are deemed worthy not because of their strength but because of God's assistance through the sign of the Cross. As I have often said, the Lord himself struggles and triumphs in them. Therefore, it is necessary that we seek their patronage, so that we may be worthy to be helped by their approbation. What we cannot be worthy to obtain by our own merits we can receive by their intercessions. Hence, by using the help of the Holy Trinity, we are worthy of being [considered] martyrs and we renounce fleshly desires, as was said by he who crowns in heaven with precious stones those who faithfully struggle for him. He deigns to protect in this world the foster-children who venerate his friends, and he maintains that the martyrs, whom he receives as immortals in the beauty of Paradise, will help when they are called upon by his people. In the Day of Judgment, when eternal glory surrounds them, the grace of their mediation will either excuse us or a mild punishment will pass over us. He will not condemn to eternity for their sins the defendants whom he redeemed deserving of the precious blood [of the martyrs].<sup>1</sup>

1 *GM* 106, p. 111: 'Ergo et tu, si viriliter et non tepide signum vel fronti vel pectori salutare superponas, tunc resistendo vitiis martyr habebis, quia et ipsi martyres ea quae vicerunt non suis viribus, sed Dei haec auxiliis per signaculum crucis gloriosissime peregerunt, in quibus, ut saepe diximus, ipse Dominus et dimicat et triumphat. Unde oportet nobis eorum patrocinia expetere, ut eorum mereamur suffragiis adiuvari, vel, quod nostris digni non sumus meritis obtinere eorum possimus intercessionibus adipisci, ut adiutorio sacrae Trinitatis usi, effici mereamur martyres, carnalibus desideriis abdicatis, ut ipse dicit, qui pro se fideliter dimicantes lapidibus pretiosis coronat in caelo; alumnos cultoresque amicorum suorum protegere dignetur in saeculo ac praestet, ut adsistant martyres invocati a suis, quos post victoriam paradisi beatitudinis retenet immortales; ut in illo examinationis tempore, cum illos gloria aeterna circumdat, nos aut excuset mediatrix venia aut levis poena pertranseat; nec damnet reos pro criminis actione in perpetuo, quos pretiosi sanguinis commertio reparavit'. This and all subsequent translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

With these words, Gregory of Tours (d. 594) concludes his short treatise, the *Glory of the Martyrs*, in which he glorifies the deeds of the martyrs by describing miracles that were performed by or are related to martyrs from the entire Mediterranean world. These stories, alongside others that appear in the rest of Gregory's hagiographical collections, stand at the center of this study.<sup>2</sup>

As accounts that depict all kinds of miracles that took place in various places and involve people from all walks of life, these stories offer a rare glimpse into the social, political, cultural, and religious history of sixth-century Merovingian Gaul. Gregory of Tours, a bishop and a Gallo-Roman, composed these works during the twenty years he served at the bishop of Tours and he used them in order to teach his audience about their past, their community, and the meaning of being Christians. By doing so, as this book aims to unfold, Gregory composed an ecclesiastical history, shared his vision of community, and constructed a Gallo-Christian identity that was simultaneously based on a shared belief, mutual history, and geography. Saints, their cults, and their popularity were used by Gregory in order to tell the story of the Merovingian Church and its people, to connect the past to the present, and form what Benedict Anderson defines as 'imagined community'.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that some or most of the individuals in Gregory's audience did not know each other personally, but they still had certain connections and obligations to each other which brought them together and made them feel part of the same community. Gregory's works responded to this notion, and by using the cults of saints he defined and explained the elements that formed this community.

Gregory's statement at the end of the *Glory of the Martyrs* gives us a glimpse into his perception of the meaning of the cult of saints and martyrs, and this notion is crucial for any attempt to analyze Gregory's hagiographies and understand their purpose. 'It is necessary that we seek their patronage', he explains, because this may assist their followers at the End of Times, at the Last Judgment, 'when eternal glory surrounds them, the grace of their mediation will either excuse us or a mild punishment will pass over us'.

2 These collections include the aforementioned *Glory of the Martyrs* as well as the *Glory of the Confessors* and the *Vita Patrum*.

3 In his famous study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines the concept of imagined communities. According to him, a nation is 'an imagined political community. [...] [I]t is imagined because the members of the even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. This notion is true for many societies, from various geographical origins and periods, and thus it is also true for early medieval societies. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6. See also Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*.

Thus, the saints and martyrs were crucial to one's salvation, and as such they had a central role in the lives of Christian believers, the followers whom Gregory mentions in his sermon. As mediators, saints created a bridge between Heaven and earth, past and present, and for this they were venerated. Gregory used the popularity and importance of the saints as well as their dual role as mediators to propagate their cults, but also in order to describe the history of his audience and formulate an identity based on that history. The stories he told, I shall argue, were relatable, and thus they created a sense of belonging to a community whose members had a mutual past and hopes for a similar future.

## The Cults of Saints

The 'cults of saints' is a general term for various types of rituals and practices that celebrate the saints, that is, those extraordinary Christians, men and women, who were appreciated for their piety and religious zeal. The first saints to be venerated were the Apostles, who accompanied Jesus before and after his death. Then came the martyrs, the faithful Christians who refused to renounce their Christian faith as the authorities of the Roman Empire persecuted them, put them on trial, tortured them, and executed them in various horrible ways. With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, other exceptional figures joined this 'holy family' of saints, among them priests and bishops, hermits, nuns, and abbots, as well as others, who proved their pure devotion to God through their actions.<sup>4</sup>

The cults of saints is already in evidence in the famous *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the first half of the fourth century by the Palestinian bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339). There, Eusebius records many stories of martyrdom, including that of the forty-eight martyrs of Lyons (177); he reports that:

[T]he bodies of the martyrs, after having been exposed and insulted in every way for six days, and afterwards burned and turned to ashes, were swept by the wicked into the river Rhone which flows nearby, that not even a relic of them might still appear upon the earth.<sup>5</sup>

4 Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, p. 154; Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum', p. 2; Rapp, 'Saints and the Holy Men', pp. 550–551.

5 *EHV*.1.62, p. 436: 'τὰ οὖν σώματα τῶν μαρτύρων παντοίως παραδειγματισθέντα καὶ αἰθριασθέντα ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ἕξ, μετέπειτα καέντα καὶ αἰθαλωθέντα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνόμων κατεσαρώθη εἰς τὸν Ῥοδανὸν ποταμὸν πλησίον παραρρέοντα, ὅπως μηδὲ λείψανον αὐτῶν φαίνεται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔτι'; trans. *EH*, p. 437.



Eusebius's report indicates that, even at that very early stage, martyrs and their body parts were already important to Christians and were venerated as holy remains.<sup>6</sup>

Relics indeed formed an important component of the Christian cult of saints, but it was not the only one. No less crucial were the stories told about the saints, their lives and deaths, the great deeds they did and the miracles they performed in their lifetimes and after their deaths. During the persecution period, texts about the martyrs were already being written down. In the late 1970s, Herbert Musurillo collected a few of the earliest *passiones* of the Christian martyrs, including the martyrdom accounts of Polycarp, Perpetua, Agathonice, and others.<sup>7</sup> The early textual records of the acts of the martyrs – the hagiographical or martyrological evidence – were brief, and their structure and content recalls that of juridical protocols. One generally reads a short description of the life and character of the martyr(s), their dialogue with the judge (usually an emperor or a proconsul), a verdict, and then punishment and execution. There were some exceptional texts, such as the one describing the martyrdom of Perpetua and her companions, which provides a long narrative in diary form.<sup>8</sup> But most early martyrdom acts have a similar, legalistic structure.<sup>9</sup>

The Christianization of the Roman world brought some changes to the Christian cults of saints. Alongside expanding the categories of sainthood, the Christian triumph also impacted on the hagiographical literature. Instead of short martyrological accounts, we now encounter longer treatises that describe at length the life of the saint, their deeds, and their eventual death, sometimes including some post-mortem miracle accounts. In the East we find, for instance, hagiographical records about hermits and monks such as the Egyptian monk, Pachomius the Great.<sup>10</sup> In the West, we see works

6 See also the Gregory of Tours's version of the legend of the forty-eight martyrs of Lyons and their relics in *GM* 48, pp. 71–72. On the role of relics in the cults of saints see Geary, *Furta Sacra*; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Brown, 'Relics and Social Status'; Wortley, 'The Origin'; Smith, 'Relics'; see also the various papers in Räsänen, Hartmann and Richards (eds.), *Relics, Identity, and Memory in Medieval Europe*; Freeman, *Holy Bones Holy Dust*; Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*.

7 Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. New editions of these texts can be found in Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*.

8 Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*; Kitzler, *From Passio Perpetuae to Acta Perpetuae*.

9 On the structure of early martyrdom acts see Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*.

10 *Sancti Pachomi Vitae Graecae*.

such as the *Vita Martini* written by Sulpicius Severus about the life of the bishop Martin of Tours.<sup>11</sup>

Written accounts of saints were a means of commemorating their deeds and passing them to future generations. They were also used in celebrations of the saints. Thus, for instance, during feast days, accounts of the lives and deeds of the saints were read aloud, and stories of the saints were passed to the community, explaining to its members why the saints should be venerated. Some of those stories and written accounts were transmitted to other Christian communities. This phenomenon began at a very early stage of Christian history. During the persecution period, stories of martyrs were already being sent to foreign communities, as exemplified by the account of the forty-eight martyrs of Lyons. This story appears in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius as a quotation from a letter that was sent from the Christian communities of Vienne and Lyons to those in Phrygia and the province of Asia.<sup>12</sup> Stories were also translated and disseminated, as the Latin and Greek accounts of the martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice prove.<sup>13</sup> In sixth-century Gaul, in the city of Tours, Bishop Gregory continued this longstanding tradition, writing an entire corpus of hagiographical works, among them the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini*,<sup>14</sup> the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*,<sup>15</sup> the *Vita Patrum*,<sup>16</sup> the *Glory of the Confessors*,<sup>17</sup> and the *Glory of the Martyrs*.<sup>18</sup>

Besides *vitae*, *passiones*, and *miracula*, which documented the history of the saint or martyr, there are other types of texts about saints that could be considered hagiography. Sermons, homilies, calendars, and martyrologies, for instance, were also composed in order to commemorate the saints, propagate their cults, and celebrate their feast days. Moreover, historiographical records such as histories and chronicles also include hagiographic content: an account about a certain miracle by a saint, a relic, or even a full-length *vita* of a saint. Yet, when it comes to such sources, scholars tend to differentiate them from hagiography. The reverse is also true, and usually hagiographical

11 Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, pp. 248–316; see also the new edition of Philip Burton, published in 2017.

12 *EH* V.1.3, p. 406.

13 *Μαρτύριον τῶν Ἁγίων Κάρπου, Παπύλου, καὶ Ἀγαθονίχης*, pp. 22–29; *Passio SS. Carpi, Pamfili et Agathonicae*, pp. 28–37; See also Rotman, ‘Voluntary Martyrdom’.

14 *VSM*.

15 *V SJ*.

16 *VP*.

17 *GC*.

18 *GM*.

records are rarely considered historiography. This study aims to challenge this dichotomic notion of history and hagiography, offering a more flexible approach to texts while bearing in mind the limitations of traditional definitions of literary genres.<sup>19</sup>

For many years, there was a tendency to examine hagiographical texts within the context of the cults of saints and the role these texts played in the cults. Hagiographical texts helped historians to recreate biographies of saints, to discuss the development of their cult, or to survey liturgical processes. In the 1970s, Peter Brown changed that perception with his seminal study on the holy man in late antique Syria.<sup>20</sup> Brown's insights on how hagiographical texts and cults of saints can teach modern historians about the social and political history of the community that venerates these saints gave scholars new ways to examine cults of saints and hagiographical records.<sup>21</sup> Hagiography became a crucial source for the study of human history, as numerous studies prove. Scholars use hagiography to examine politics, social dynamics, gender, identity, and many other subjects. The wide range of hagiography – the many types of texts that are included under this literary definition and the diversity of its audience and protagonists – make hagiographical literature a rich source that reveals many aspects of human history that are not always apparent in traditional historiographical sources. A recent example is the study of medieval queer history that is made possible thanks to the unique information offered by hagiography, which helps us reach a better understanding of both the past and the present.<sup>22</sup>

However, this scholarly trend is still not entirely apparent with regard to the hagiographical works of Gregory of Tours, mainly because they were not studied as a coherent whole. Indeed, Gregory's *vitae* and the books of miracles have long been overshadowed by his famous historiographical work, the *Ten Books of Histories*, and it is the aim of this book to fill this gap and offer a fresh perspective on and analysis of Gregory's hagiographies. These works, I shall argue, are more than a mere depiction of lives of saints

19 Recently, Felice Lifshitz discussed the problems with the concept of hagiography. See Lifshitz, 'Still Useless'. This article responds and broadens the discussion offered in to her 1994 paper, 'Beyond Positivism'. For further reading on early medieval hagiography see Heinzelmann, 'L'hagiographie mérovingienne'; Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography*; Diem, 'Vita Vel Regula'; Mériaux, 'Bishops, Monks and Priests'.

20 Brown, 'Rise and Function'.

21 On Brown's impact on modern scholarship see, for instance, the papers collected in Howard-Johnston and Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*.

22 See, for instance, the papers in Spencer-Hall and Gutt, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*; Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality*.

and the propagation of their cults. They also reveal aspects of the history of Merovingian Gaul, Gregory's attitude towards history, and the manner in which Gregory and his contemporaries responded to the changes that followed the disintegration of the Roman Empire and redefined their place in the world.

## Gregory of Tours and his Work

Gregory of Tours hardly needs any introduction. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, studies about Gregory and his *Ten Books of Histories* have proliferated.<sup>23</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, three vast volumes on Gregory of Tours and his time have been published: two focus on Gregory of Tours and his world, and the third one focuses on Merovingian history more broadly.<sup>24</sup> Gregory is one of the most popular late antique and early medieval historians, and there are good reasons for that. His *Histories* is among the few historiographical records that have survived from the early Merovingian period. Whether or not his opening remark in the *Histories* that 'it is impossible to find any scholar who is skilled in the art of writing who could depict these matters in prose or verse',<sup>25</sup> is wholly accurate, he did nevertheless author a source that became essential for modern historians of late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. There is no other historiographical narrative of the history of Merovingian Gaul that comes close to Gregory's in scope and depth. Scholars use this source to study almost every aspect of Merovingian history, including its politics and diplomacy, as well as its religious, social, and cultural histories; many of these studies are cited in this book.

Yet the popularity of the *Histories* and its centrality to modern attempts to explain different aspects of Merovingian history has led to a certain neglect of Gregory's hagiographical corpus.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, when it comes to Gregory's

23 To list only a few books: Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 112–234; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, originally published in German in 1994 as *Gregor von Tours*; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751*; Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines*. Many more article and book chapters about Gregory of Tours and his time were written, some of which are cited along this study.

24 Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*; Murray (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*; Effros and Moreira (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to the Merovingian World*.

25 *LH*, preaf., p. 1: 'nec reperire possit quisquam peritus dialectica in arte Grammaticus qui haec aut stilo prosaico aut metrico depingeret versu'.

26 There are, of course, some exceptions. See for instance Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*; Kreiner, *Social Life of Hagiography*; Lucas, 'Heilige in Ost und West bei Gregor von Tours'. It is

career as hagiographer, he is best known for his longer hagiographical works – the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini*, the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani* and the *Vita Patrum*. His other hagiographical works, namely, the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors*, have received comparatively little scholarly attention. These lesser-known hagiographical collections contain accounts of miracles that were performed by martyrs and saints. They mostly feature stories of Gallic saints, but there are also several accounts about foreign saints and martyrs. Most of these appear in the *Glory of the Martyrs*, in which Gregory includes twelve accounts about Italian martyrs, four more about Spanish ones, one about a North African martyr and ten about martyrs from the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. To this group of foreign saints, one may add about thirty-five accounts about New Testament protagonists. The *Glory of the Confessors* includes only one account about an eastern saint, another one about an Italian saint and two more accounts about events that took place in Spain and do not discuss any saint in particular. Like the *Histories*, the hagiographical corpus contains crucial evidence that may assist anyone who is interested in the cultural, social, political and, of course, religious history of Merovingian Gaul. Reading this corpus alongside the *Histories* can help us reach a more nuanced understanding of that period. For this reason, this study focuses on Gregory of Tours's hagiographical corpus.

Although all Gregory's hagiographical works have been published as modern critical editions in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (MGH) and have been translated into modern languages, thus becoming accessible to scholars, the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani* have received the bulk of scholarly attention.<sup>27</sup> The translators of Gregory's hagiographical works have offered little analysis of the sources, providing only short introductions about the author and his corpus. There has been no attempt to contextualize the works within their broader social, cultural, political, literary and religious contexts. Hence, these other works still await their scholarly due.

also worth mentioning Paul Fouracre's study on later Merovingian hagiography. See Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', and Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*.

27 For an English translation of Gregory's hagiographical writings, see Gregory of Tours, *The Glory of the Martyrs*, trans. Raymond Van Dam; Gregory of Tours, *The Glory of the Confessors*, trans. Raymond Van-Dam; Gregory of Tours, *The Lives of the Fathers*, trans. Edward James; Gregory of Tours, *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, trans. William C. McDermott; Gregory of Tours, *The Suffering and Miracle of the Martyr St. Julian*, trans. Raymond Van Dam; Gregory of Tours, *The Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin*, trans. Raymond Van Dam. See also Giselle de Nie, *Gregory of Tours, Lives and Miracles* for new translations of the *VP*, *VSM* and *VSJ*. For French translations, see Grégoire de Tours, *Les livres des miracles et autres opuscules*, trans. Henri L. Bordier.



Raymond Van Dam's book, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, is probably the best example of this scholarly trend.<sup>28</sup> Van Dam focused almost exclusively on the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*. He used these works to define the characteristics of the Merovingian cults of saints and explain how Gregory used them for his own political benefit. Yet he hardly mentioned the rest of Gregory's hagiographical writings, thus limiting his perspective on the history of the Merovingian cults of saints. Similarly, John Corbett, following Peter Brown's approach to hagiography and the social role of saints, also concentrated on the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* when he wrote in the mid-1980s about the cult of saints in the world of Gregory of Tours.<sup>29</sup> Van Dam and Corbett are not alone. Yitzhak Hen, for instance, made similar use of the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani* when he discussed the relations between the saint and the individual.<sup>30</sup> When Hen mentions the miracle collections of Gregory of Tours or his *Vita Patrum*, he does so briefly, only to exemplify which texts were probably read during liturgical celebrations.<sup>31</sup>

Recently, Jamie Kreiner has reconstructed the social history of Merovingian Gaul through an examination of Merovingian hagiography.<sup>32</sup> Kreiner looks at the entire Merovingian period, and she emphasizes the important role of sixth-century Merovingian authors, such as Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus, demonstrating their impact on later Merovingian hagiographers. Kreiner's choice to take the *vitae* as representative of Merovingian hagiography led her to focus more on the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*, like her predecessors, and she hardly speaks of the miracle collections of Gregory of Tours, their role in this history of Merovingian hagiography, and what may be gained from such an inquiry.

František Graus's monograph on Merovingian hagiography, written in 1965, marks a different approach in the scholarship on Gregory of Tours's hagiographical corpus. In contrast to most other historians, Graus did not limit himself to the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*, and in his survey, he made occasional use of the *Vita Patrum* and the two miracle collections of Gregory of Tours.<sup>33</sup> In the 1980s, Peter Brown discussed Gregory's hagiographical works. His paper on relics in Merovingian society, for instance, includes many references to the *Vita Patrum*, the *Glory of the*

28 Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*.

29 Corbett, 'Praesentium Signorum Munera'; idem, 'Hagiography and the Experience'.

30 Hen, *Culture and Religion*, pp. 111–120.

31 Hen, *Culture and Religion*, p. 86.

32 Kreiner, *Social Life of Hagiography*.

33 Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger*.



*Martyrs and the Glory of the Confessors*.<sup>34</sup> Brown used accounts from these works to piece together a social and religious history of Merovingian Gaul, yet he extracted the accounts from their literary context and did not treat each work as a coherent whole. As such, he provided only a partial picture of the social history of Merovingian Gaul.

In 1998, John Kitchen published his book *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, in which he examined Merovingian hagiography, and particularly the works of Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours.<sup>35</sup> Kitchen begins the section on Gregory of Tours by criticizing previous scholarship for focusing more on Gregory's historiographical work than on his hagiography. He continues with a thorough analysis of one of Gregory's less popular hagiographical works, the *Vita Patrum*, which eventually leads him to discuss Gregory's depiction of female saints. Kitchen's study is noteworthy, not least because of his innovative treatment of gender issues in Merovingian hagiographical sources. His choice to focus on the *Vita Patrum* is also quite significant, as it marks a turning point in the attention given by scholars to Gregory's lesser hagiographical works.

Not long after Kitchen's book came out, Danuta Shanzer published her paper 'So Many Saints – So Little Time... the *Libri Miraculorum* of Gregory of Tours', in which she also mentions the lack of scholarship on a large part of Gregory's hagiographical work.<sup>36</sup> Shanzer points to a handful of exceptions, such as Raymond Van Dam's translations of the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors*, Edward James' translation of the *Vita Patrum*, and two papers written by Peter Brown at the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> She thus focuses on the lesser-known hagiographical works by Gregory of Tours – the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors* – leaving aside the *Vita Patrum* on 'generic grounds, since, as Gregory himself knew, it did not constitute a "Liber miraculorum"'.<sup>38</sup> Such a statement is at odds with Gregory's own words at the end of the preface to the *Glory of the Confessors*, which clearly indicates that although he did not list the *Vita Patrum* among the miracle books at the end of the *Histories*, he certainly viewed it as part of his hagiographical corpus.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, despite her 'declaration of intent',

34 Brown, 'Relics and Social Status'.

35 Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, pp. 58–100, 101–114.

36 Shanzer, 'So Many Saints'.

37 For the translations of Van Dam and James see above, n. 27; Brown, 'Relics and Social Status'; idem, *The Cult of the Saints*. Shanzer does not mention the book by Kitchen and the criticism he offers.

38 Shanzer, 'So Many Saints', p. 22 n. 18.

39 GC, praef. p. 298: 'Igitur in primo libello inseruimus aliqua de miraculis Domini ac sanctorum apostolorum reliquorumque martyrum, quae actenus latuerunt, quae Deus ad corroborandam



Shanzer follows her predecessors in basing her argument on the analysis of the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*. She does have some new insights to offer on the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors*, and she certainly situates these works, correctly, in the context of Gregory's hagiographical corpus. Nonetheless, she does not treat the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors* as two separate books, and she does not give them the attention she herself admits they deserve.

To these studies, we can add the work of Giselle de Nie. De Nie is interested in the spiritual world of Gregory of Tours, and she uses his miracle stories to penetrate that world. Because of her interest in miracle stories, De Nie pays much more attention than other scholars to Gregory's hagiographical corpus as a whole. Nevertheless, the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani* still loom large in her studies, much more so than accounts taken from Gregory's other miracle collections.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, her research centers on the literary aspect of Gregory's works and hardly engages with their historical side.

There are good reasons for scholars to focus almost entirely on the books on Martin of Tours and Julian of Brioude. These are the longest and most detailed hagiographical works composed by Gregory, each considering a single saint. The length of the books and the rich narratives Gregory supplies have helped scholars to reconstruct the development of the cult of each saint and reach broad conclusions regarding the characteristics of the Merovingian cults of saint. Thus, for instance, they have argued that the Merovingian cults focused on local, Gallic saints.<sup>41</sup> However, singling out two works as representative of the cult of saints in sixth-century Gaul and of Gregory's hagiographical writing does not do justice to the complexity of either the cults or Gregory's corpus, nor to his role as an author.

fideliū fidem cotidie dignatur augere; quia valde molestum erat, ut traderentur oblivion. In secundo posuimus de virtutibus sancti Iuliani. Quattuor vero libellos de virtutibus sancti Martini. Septimum de quorundam feliciorum vita. Octavum hunc scribimus de miraculis confessorum' ['In a first book [GM] I therefore included some of the miracles of the Lord, the holy apostles, and the other martyrs. These miracles had been unknown until now, [but] God deigned to increase them daily to strengthen the faith of believers. For it was surely improper that they disappear from memory. In a second book [VJ] I wrote about the miracles of saint Julian. [I wrote] four books [VM 1–4] about the miracles of saint Martin, and a seventh [VP] about the life of some blessed [saints]. I am writing this eighth book about the miracles of the confessors'].

40 See for example: De Nie, 'History and Miracle'; idem, 'The Language in Miracle'; idem, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower*.

41 Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*; Thacker, 'The Making of Local Saint', p. 67; Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum', pp. 1–44; Wood, 'Constructing Cults in Early Medieval France', p. 161.



## East and West

Gregory's inclusion of accounts of non-Gallic saints and martyrs in his *Glory of the Confessors* and *Glory of the Martyrs* points to another subject that has not received much attention in modern scholarship: the relationship between the Merovingian kingdoms and their Mediterranean counterparts, especially Byzantium, and particularly their cultural and religious exchange. In 1957, Walter Goffart examined the relations of the Byzantine emperors with the West, focusing on their need for allegiance in order to gain military support.<sup>42</sup> Twenty years later, Averil Cameron discussed these relations in two papers: one which traced the eastern sources Gregory of Tours used in his accounts about the Byzantine Empire,<sup>43</sup> and a second which addressed the religious policy of Justin II (d. 578). In the latter, she mentions the transmission of the relics of the Holy Cross from the Byzantine capital to Queen Radegund (d. 587), explaining this from a Byzantine political point of view.<sup>44</sup> In the early 1990s, Isabel Moreira explored the transmission of the relics of the Holy Cross from a western perspective, looking into the accounts of Gregory of Tours, Venantius Fortunatus and Baudonivia. Moreira, however, did not even consider the context of the eastern–western relations in this episode.<sup>45</sup>

The past few years have seen a burgeoning interest in the various perspectives through which the relationships between the East and the West can be examined. A volume edited by Ian Wood and Andreas Fischer, for instance, brings together six papers that look into the relations between the East and West during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, focusing on the entire Merovingian period.<sup>46</sup> Another example of this scholarly change of direction is the research project led by Yitzhak Hen and Stefan Esders, *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, in which I was fortunate enough to take part. The meetings of the project in Be'er Sheva and Berlin discussed the Merovingian political, cultural, social, and religious history in a Mediterranean context, examining various developments from the viewpoint of relations between the Merovingians and their eastern and western counterparts. The project yielded two volumes,<sup>47</sup> and some of the studies published in them, including my own, begin to tackle

42 Goffart, 'Byzantine Policy in the West'.

43 Cameron, 'The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours'.

44 Cameron, 'The Early Byzantine Policies of Justin II'.

45 Moreira, 'Provisatrix optima'.

46 Fischer and Wood (eds.), *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean*.

47 Esders, Fox, Hen and Sarti (eds.), *East and West in the Early Middle Ages*; Esders, Hen, Lucas and Rotman (eds.), *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Mediterranean World*.



the questions of the cults of non-Gallic saints in Merovingian Gaul.<sup>48</sup> But there is still more work to be done on this matter, and none of these studies goes into the question of Gregory of Tours's inclusion of eastern martyrs in the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the meaning of it. Their inclusion in this work clearly signals some kind of cultural and religious relations between Merovingian Gaul and other Mediterranean politico-cultural entities. The lack of research on Gregory's hagiographical corpus and the few studies on the relations between East and West during the Merovingian period call for a thorough examination of Gregory's hagiographical corpus. Such an examination can give us a better understanding of the Merovingian cults of saints, Frankish foreign policies, and the cultural and religious dynamics in the early medieval Mediterranean.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, it can also help us better grasp the aims of Gregory's hagiography, his authorial originality and, as will be demonstrated in what follows, his vision of community, identity, and history.

### The Aims of this Study

The focus of this study is on Gregory's small miracle collections: the *Glory of the Martyrs*, the *Glory of the Confessors*, and the *Vita Patrum*. These three works, I shall argue, should be read together as a historiographical record of the Frankish Church with the intent of constructing a Gallo-Christian identity among its audience. The transformation of the Roman world and the political and cultural change that followed it forced people to find new ways to define themselves and their communities. Gregory's hagiographical collections reflect that need and give modern scholars a new perspective on those developments.

Two themes in these books stand out in particular: Gregory's choice to include accounts of non-Gallic saints and his unique literary style. More than a third of the *Glory of the Martyrs* is dedicated to non-Gallic protagonists, among them ten accounts of eastern martyrs.<sup>50</sup> The *Glory of the Confessors*, for its part, features one account of a Syrian saint.<sup>51</sup> Gregory's choice to include these accounts is puzzling. As noted above, scholars tend to agree

48 See Rotman, 'Imitation and Rejection'; Wynn, 'Cultural Transmission Caught in the Act'.

49 In her doctoral project, Pia Lucas is also looking at these issues, but with a completely different focus. See Lucas, 'Heilige in Ost und West bei Gregor von Tours'.

50 *GM* 85, p. 96; *GM* 94–102, pp. 100–107.

51 *GC* 26, p. 314.



that the Merovingian cults of saints focused on local, Gallic saints. The inclusion of non-Gallic saints and martyrs in treatises that are traditionally associated with the cults of saints challenges the foundations of this scholarly view. It is necessary, then, to further examine these accounts and trace the cults of their protagonists in sixth-century Gaul. Whether or not the eastern saints were venerated in Gaul, their inclusion in Gregory's narrative surely points to the transmission of relics, oral traditions, written accounts, and even cults of saints from the East to the West.

This study begins with a short introduction on Gregory, his hagiographical works and his role as an author and hagiographer. Such an introduction is essential since Gregory's authorial choices in his hagiographical collections must be contextualized in his wider approach to hagiography. Thus, Chapter 1 examines how Gregory uses the *Virtutibus Sancti Martini*, the *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani*, and the *Vita Patrum* to fortify his role as the bishop of Tours and enforce his episcopal authority. No naïve recorder of saints and their cults, Gregory was a creative and sophisticated author who composed multilayered texts for various purposes.

Understanding Gregory's approach to hagiography lays the groundwork for the second part of the book, in which I broaden the discussion on Gregory's hagiographical corpus and his ingenuity as an author. This part contains three chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss the non-Gallic saints and martyrs whom Gregory included in his miracle collections, giving special attention to the eastern saints. The chapter follows the cults of these saints and offers several possible channels via which stories, relics, and cults of saints could have reached Merovingian Gaul. Tracing the cults of the eastern saints, I will show, reveals that while some saints were venerated to some extent in the Merovingian realm, others were not as lucky, and there is no evidence of their cult in sixth-century Gaul. Thus, the purpose of their inclusion in Gregory's works remains an open question.

Chapter 3, then, attempts to suggest other reasons for the inclusion of the accounts of foreign saints and martyrs in the *Glory of the Martyrs* and the *Glory of the Confessors*. Hagiography was tightly tied up with the cults of saints. Making sense of the hagiographical records of saints who were not venerated is difficult, and sometimes impossible. Therefore, Chapter 3 offers a different approach to such texts in Gregory's hagiographical corpus. Instead of being restricted to one specific literary genre, I shall argue that the miracle collections, these peculiar hagiographical records, may have other literary purposes – more precisely, a historiographical purpose. Examining the structure of Gregory's hagiographical collections and comparing them to his *Ten Books of Histories*, as well as discerning other literary similarities between

the two *corpora*, suggest that Gregory intended them to be read together as an 'Ecclesiastical History'. A comparison of Gregory's 'Ecclesiastical History' with that of Eusebius of Caesarea may strengthen this observation.

Finally, Chapter 4 expands this discussion and investigates the type of ecclesiastical history Gregory sought to craft. Examining this history in the context of the end of the Roman world and within the scholarly discussion of the identity crisis of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages suggests that Gregory aimed to write a very specific history and construct a very specific identity – a Gallo-Christian one. Moreover, as the last part of Chapter 4 will show, Gregory was not the only author of his time who harnessed hagiography to construct local religious identities. Pope Gregory the Great and the anonymous compilers of the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* may have had similar motivations for composing their hagiographical works.

Thus, following the path paved by Peter Brown and later scholars almost half a century ago, this study seeks to lift Gregory's hagiographical works from the plane of mere anecdotal data about the cults of certain saints to a higher register of complex historical documents. By approaching Gregory's hagiographical works as part of a broader historiographical context, this study aims to unveil new insights into the culture and religion of Merovingian Gaul.



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