Mutations of Diversity in the Merovingian Kingdom

Helmut Reimitz*

Recent studies of the post-Roman West have shown a reconfiguration of the social and political structures of the Roman Empire, where local and regional elites worked together with barbarian governors and generals to establish their own »little Romes«. When Gregory, the future bishop of Tours, was growing up in the Auvergne in the 540s, these little Romes in Gaul had already become part of a common political framework: the Merovingian kingdom. It was the only post-Roman kingdom whose territory extended from the North Sea to the Mediterranean and from the Rhineland to the English Channel and the Atlantic coast. The integration of this extensive and diverse territory into one of the most prosperous post-Roman polities in the Christian West was an impressive political and cultural achievement. This article will show that Gregory, who was closely woven into the social and political fabric of this post-Roman kingdom was well aware of that. Against this background, I argue that during a time in which diverse communities and people came together to interact in the new legal and social frameworks of the Merovingian kingdom. Gregory often used his stories to underline the potential of a Christian vision of community to integrate a post-Roman diversity in the relatively new social and political framework of a post-Roman kingdom.

Keywords: Gregory of Tours, Decem libri historiarum, Merovingian period, post-Roman West, formation of the Merovingian kingdom

Introduction

Shortly before his death in 594, Gregory, bishop of Tours, ended his *Histories* with a list of all the works he had written: ten books of history, seven on the miracles of the fathers and one on their lives, a commentary on the Psalter, and another one on the services of the church.[1] Most of these texts have been preserved in many manuscripts and are accessible to us today in modern editions,[2] and through them, Gregory has become one of our principal sources for the history of Gaul in the second half of the sixth century, about three generations after the Western Roman Empire met its end as an independent political framework with the

* Correspondence details: Helmut Reimitz, History Department, Princeton University, hreimitz@princeton.edu.
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1 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, X.31, ed. Krusch and Levison, 536.

2 The other extant works have been edited in: MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 1, 2: Gregorius Turonensis episcopus, Miracula et opera minora, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover, 1885).

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deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476.[3] In sharp contrast to the future success of his works, Gregory seems to have been anxious about his literary and historiographical legacy. After the list of his writings, Gregory added a dramatic appeal to future audiences to preserve them intact and unchanged, just as he had left them.

> I conjure you all, you Bishops of the Lord, who will have charge of Tours cathedral after my unworthy self, I conjure you all, I say, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Judgement Day feared by all sinners, that you never permit these books to be destroyed, or to be rewritten, or to be reproduced in part only with sections omitted, for otherwise when you emerge in confusion from this Judgement Day you will be condemned with the Devil. Keep them in your possession intact, with no amendments and just as I have left them to you.[4]

Gregory's appeal has long been regarded as what was to be expected from a descendant of the senatorial class of the former Roman Empire at the dawn of the Dark Ages. The cultural impoverishment of society following the decline and eventual fall of the Western Roman Empire made such drastic measures necessary, historians believed for a long time, to preserve a literary legacy such as Gregory's. Gregory himself seemed to have confirmed such views in the general preface to his *Histories*:

> In fact in the towns of Gaul the writing of literature has declined to the point where it has virtually disappeared altogether. Many people have complained about this, not once but time and time again. … I have often thought about these complaints and others like them. I have written this work to keep alive the memory of those dead and gone, and to bring them to the notice of future generations. My style is not very polished and I have had to devote much of my space to the quarrels between the wicked and the righteous. All the same I have been greatly encouraged by certain kind remarks which to my no small surprise I have often heard made by our folk, that only a few understand the rhetorical style of philosophers, but many can follow a simple language.[5]

More recent research, however, has shown that we should neither take such statements at face value nor imagine Gregory's appeal as a desperate effort to preserve his works exactly as he had left them in the cultural deserts of early medieval Gaul. Newer studies have shown that the post-Roman West did not slide continuously and irreversibly into a Dark Age after the deposition of the Western Roman Empire. What we observe is rather a reconfiguration of the social and political structures of the Roman Empire, where local and regional elites

3 On Gregory, see Murray (ed.), A companion to Gregory of Tours; Heinzelmann, Gregor von Tours, with ample references to the »academic industry« on Gregory (Ian Wood) since the 1990s. See now also: Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul*; the two excellent articles by Merrington, The building projects and the Histories of Gregory of Tours; Flierman, Gregory of Tours and the Merovingian letter.

4 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, X.31, ed. Krusch and Levison, 536; trans. Thorpe, 603.

5 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, preface, ed. Krusch and Levison, 1; trans. Thorpe, 63 (with slight changes).

worked together with barbarian governors and generals to establish their own »little Romes«. To put it in the words of Peter Brown:

> Put bluntly: what brought down the western empire was the speed with which the barbarian armies were able to create local power blocs through collaboration with the local Romans. For the local elites, the barbarians brought a Rome of sorts to their own region. These power blocs attracted Roman litigants, Roman bureaucrats, Roman courtiers, and Roman military personnel. By the end of the fifth century, Latin literature began to flourish at barbarian courts. The western empire was not so much destroyed as eroded and finally rendered unnecessary by a score of little Romes, rooted in more restricted areas of control.[6]

When Gregory was growing up in the 540s in the Auvergne, these little Romes in Gaul had already become part of a common political framework: the Merovingian kingdom. Similar to the modern European state of France, it was the only post-Roman kingdom whose territory extended from the North Sea to the Mediterranean and from the Rhineland to the English Channel and the Atlantic coast. The integration of this extensive and diverse territory into one of the most prosperous post-Roman polities in the Christian West was an impressive political and cultural achievement. As we shall see, Gregory, who was closely woven into the social and political fabric of this post-Roman kingdom, was well aware of that. Against this background, we should rather see Gregory's instructions to maintain the integrity of his works as reflecting his insistence that future readers understand, and pass on, the full complexity of his arguments. During a time in which diverse societies and peoples came together to interact in the new legal and social frameworks of the Merovingian kingdom, Gregory used his writing to insist upon fully comprehending the complex networks formed by divergent backgrounds of inhabitants within the same kingdom: instead of ignoring the differences between them, he highlighted these differences as an argumentative strategy to underline the necessity of Christianity as a shared vision to integrate the different and diverse communities in the relatively new social and political framework of a post-Roman kingdom.

Contracts and Constitutions: The Integration of the Merovingian Kingdom

The integration of the little Romes in Gaul into a common political framework under the first Christian Merovingian king Clovis (d. 511.CE), however, was less a matter of military conquest than of *Verhandlungsgeschick* – negotiating skills.[7] Most of the other post-Roman kingdoms that came to replace the Western Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries – the Visigothic kingdom, the Burgundian kingdom in Gaul or the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy – were originally formed by an imperial mandate. Roman generals were tasked with kingship and sent with their troops to protect imperial provinces or regions in lieu of a regular Roman army.[8] When Clovis succeeded his father Childeric as Frankish king and governor of the

6 Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, xxvi-xxvii; and for a longer discussion: Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle,* 392-407.

7 See Esders, Nordwestgallien.

8 Esders, Die Integration der Barbaren.

territory in the northeast of Gaul around Tournai in 481/482, the little Romes south of the Loire, the Visigothic and the Burgundian kingdom, developed their very own political and social profile.[9] In each of them we observe the codification of new laws, one for the Romans and the other for the non-Roman population in the kingdom.[10] Closer to Clovis' client-kingdom around Tournai, in the north there were several smaller power blocs under the rule of other Frankish and barbarian client kings that operated more or less independently.[11]

Another northern power bloc in the northwest of Gaul was ruled by Aegidius, a former *magister militum* of the Roman Empire. He continued to govern his province, use his title and command the Roman army in the province, even though he had actually been dismissed from his office in 461 for failing to recognize Libius Severus as emperor after the murder of his predecessor Majoran.[12] Aegidius died in 465 and his son Syagrius managed to take over the government in Soissons, which acted as the administrative center of the territories northwest of the Loire, and its »Roman« army in a highly militarized frontier zone.[13] Three generations later, Gregory of Tours presented Syagrius in his *Histories* as *rex Romanorum*.[14]

About four years after the beginning of his rule, Clovis moved against this kingdom. When he did so, he relied not only on the strength of his army but also on the connections and networks of the Roman elites that had worked with him. One of the members of the Roman elite cooperating with Clovis was certainly Remigius, the bishop of Reims, who offered his support in a letter soon after the beginning of his reign. As Matthias Becher has argued in an insightful discussion of the letter, the bishop of Reims might well have offered his connections to win over the support of the elites in the Roman regnum of Soissons. After all, Remigius' brother happened to be the bishop of Soissons.[15] It worked. We have no reports of a dramatic military confrontation. In his *Histories*, Gregory presents it as a swift victory, with Syagrius fleeing quickly to the Visigothic kingdom south of the Loire.[16]

As Eugen Ewig already observed, the establishment of Clovis' rule over the regnum of Syagrius and his Roman army shows a significant difference of Clovis' policies to those of other post-Roman rulers.[17] As briefly mentioned above, the basic political structure in the little Romes south of the Loire was shaped by a binary best illustrated by the division of labor between the Romans who cooperated with the new barbarian governors in the administration of their little Rome and the barbarians, Goths or Burgundians who took over the role of

9 See the recent overviews in: Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* 422-447; Dumézil, *Servir l'état barbare*; Esders, *Sacramentum fidelitatis*; Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire*; Goffart, Administrative methods.

10 See Wood, The Making of the »Burgundian Kingdom«; Liebs, Geltung kraft Konsenses.

11 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 284-319; Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung*; Becher, *Chlodwig*, 119-143.

12 MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords,* 69-164; but cf. Drinkwater, Unbecoming Roman.

13 Esders, Nordwestgallien.

14 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, II.27, ed. Krusch and Levison, 71.

15 Becher, *Chlodwig*, 153-154.

16 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, II.27, ed. Krusch and Levison, 71.

17 Ewig, *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, 61-62.

the Roman army.[18] But in contrast to the other post-Roman kingdoms, Clovis' legitimacy was not primarily based on an imperial mandate for himself and his Frankish troops but rather on the agreements he reached with various elites in the different polities of his kingdom. In the case of his first major territorial expansion, that meant collaboration with Roman troops and their military elites, who controlled the region around Soissons.[19] Consequently the division of labor between a Frankish army and the Roman population could not be organized in the same way as in other post-Roman kingdoms. Instead, the Roman imperial practice that every free man was subject to military service and held the right to claim the status and privileges that came with it was continued in Clovis' kingdom. As a result, in this realm there was no distinction between the members of an *exercitus Francorum* (however Frankish that *exercitus* may actually have been) and the civilian population. This had important consequences for the social and ethnic texture of the Merovingian kingdom. The entire free male population came to be subject to military service, forcing them to commit to the new ruler and acknowledge him as the highest military and legal authority in exchange for his granting them privileges to maintain, protect, or even increase their social status under the new circumstances.

Clovis' successful agreements with the ecclesiastical, political and military elites in the Roman kingdom of Soissons and the ensuing accumulation of military as well as political power laid the foundations for the conquest of the largest and most powerful »little Rome« south of the Loire soon after the beginning of the sixth century: the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse.[20] In this episode, Clovis himself has left evidence of the way in which he strategized to convince elites that his rule would best serve their interests. Soon after he had started the campaign against the Visigoths south of the Loire in 507, he wrote a letter to the bishops of those territories.[21] That he, Clovis, and his army were on the move against their territory could hardly have escaped the notice of the bishops. In view of the turbulence and disruption the campaign would bring, Clovis promised the bishops protection for those who belonged to the church and for their property. In order for any others, lay or clerical, to be protected, he invited the bishops to appeal on their behalf by sending him authenticated letters. However, Clovis wrote that these would need to receive a validating precept from his court.

This is an interesting document. It does not grant a specific request but rather grants a procedural right to appeal. Clovis is inviting the bishops to enter and take part in a system of appeals. If someone requests help from the bishops and the bishops regard this as just, then they may pass it on to him, the king, for an appeal. This clearly built on the Roman system of petitions to the imperial court or its representatives.[22] But its principal force is now the king, posited in the center of a procedural frame for further communications, requests and

18 This division of labor is best documented in Ostrogothic Italy, see Wolfram, *Die Goten,* 284-290; Esders, Rechtliche Grundlagen; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 284-293; and Wiemer, Odovaker und Theoderic, 301-304.

19 Esders, Nordwestgallien.

20 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 303-310; Shanzer and Mathisen (eds.), *The Battle of Vouillé.*

21 *Chlodowici regis ad episcopos epistula*, ed. Boretius, 1-2.

22 See the excellent discussion on the *Regierungsstil*, the style of government, in the late empire by Schmidt-Hofner, *Reagieren und Gestalten*, 11-18; Schmidt-Hofner, Staatswerdung von unten, with further references; Feissel and Gascou (eds.), *La petition a Byzance*; Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 3-34.

agreements between him, the bishops and their common future subjects. In developing this system, Clovis was not only able to accumulate political support: It also increased his social and cultural capital by presenting himself as a person in charge well acquainted with the »language of persuasion« that had played such an important role to hold together the rapidly and constantly changing worlds of the late Roman Empire.[23] Very likely an important factor was that his government seemed to be the best option for the various power blocs, populations and groups in the Gallic territories of the former Roman Empire whose social, cultural and political differences had certainly gained more contour as the Western Roman Empire dissolved throughout the fifth century.[24]

Thus, the Merovingians reinforced or even multiplied the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of their kingdom by granting different groups some legal and political autonomy.[25] This created a patchwork of communities with overlapping yet differing cultural traditions, legal frameworks and social and political constitutions. This also included the *Franci*, who became one group among many in the fabric of the Merovingian kingdom, and who, depending on context and region, could play a more or less important role.[26]

The Man in the Middle – Gregory of Tours at Tours

This was the world into which Gregory of Tours was born in 538. He grew up in the transitional zone of the Auvergne, between the Midi and northern France. Both of his parents belonged to families with senatorial descent and many members of these families had already become bishops in the sixth century.[27] His uncle Gallus was the bishop of Gregory's hometown Clermont. Gallus also oversaw Gregory's education after his father died in 548 and entrusted young Gregory's education to Avitus, who would later become the bishop of Clermont and was likely another member of the familial network. Gregory became a deacon and visited the ecclesiastical and episcopal members of his familial network frequently, traveling from Clermont to Lyon to Langres or Tours.[28] He also developed good relations with the kings and elites at the royal court of the Eastern Merovingian kingdom in Reims, and later Metz. When Gregory succeeded his uncle Eufronius as bishop of Tours in 573, it was the royal couple of this kingdom, Sigibert I and his wife Brunhild, who supported his appointment.[29]

At the time of Gregory's ascension to bishop of Tours, the place was already a hotbed of competing efforts to gain influence over the city. Tours was particularly valuable for

23 Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 30-31; for forms of patronage in the late antique Western Roman Empire, see Krause, *Spätantike Patronatsformen*; for its cultural adoption in post-Roman Gaul, now Williard, *Friendship*, 18-24, with further references.

24 Halsall, *Barbarian migrations*, 346-357.

25 Esders, Nordwestgallien.

26 For the varying salience of Frankishness in the early Merovingian kingdom, see Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 98-123.

27 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 7-26; Wood, Individuality.

28 Heinzelmann, Gregory of Tours: the elements of a biography, 23-24.

29 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 34-36.

possessing the prestigious shrine of Saint Martin.[30] The enormous success of the *Life* of Martin that Sulpicius Severus wrote soon after Martin's death in 397 CE made Martin one of the most popular saints of the Western Roman Empire.[31] One of Gregory's predecessors and ancestors, Perpetuus of Tours (d. 490), was probably the dedicatee of another versified version of Martin's life by Paulinus of Périgueux.[32] Gregory himself contributed to the prestige of the cult with four books on the life and miracles of the saint.[33] During Gregory's episcopate, his protégé and friend the poet Venantius Fortunatus composed a versified version of the saint's life, which he may have dedicated to Gregory.[34] With his extensive social and literary networks and prolific hagiographical and historiographical output, Gregory undoubtedly played an important role in establishing Tours, with its shrine of Saint Martin, as one of the most important spiritual centers in the Merovingian kingdom.[35]

But as we read in the *Histories*, Martin also helped Gregory. He apparently stood by his side whenever Gregory needed him – and Gregory needed the saint's support quite often. Tours had not only become an important spiritual center; it also held political significance as it lay at a crucial joining point between southern and northwestern Gaul in the Loire valley. After the death of Chlothar I in 561 and the division of the kingdom into four subkingdoms,[36] different kings tried to gain control over the spiritually and strategically important city and its resources. In the wake of their rulers' conflicts, other members of the governing class or ecclesiastical elites also tried to take advantage of Tours' exposed position.[37]

At the same time that Gregory became bishop of Tours in 573 by appointment of King Sigibert, who ruled the Eastern Merovingian kingdom, Sigibert's brother, Chilperic, king of the northwestern kingdom of Soissons, sent his son Theuderic to conquer the Tourraine.[38] Sigibert soon re-established control, but immediately after the king's death in 575, Chilperic restarted his efforts to bring the city under his control.[39] He sent his duke Roccolen to the Loire, who then robbed and devastated the countryside of Tours. Roccolen included properties that belonged to the church in his destruction. It did not take long for Saint Martin to interfere, as Gregory points out. He punished the duke, who died shortly thereafter, with jaundice.[40] Other troubles came from Gregory's fellow bishops, particularly the bishop of the

30 Pietri, *La ville de Tours.*

31 Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and his Hagiographer*; Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique*.

32 Van Dam, Paulinus of Périgueux; Labarre, *Le manteau partagé.*

33 Gregory of Tours, *De virtutibus Sancti Martini episcopi libri IV*, ed. Krusch; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*; see now the English translation by De Nie, *Lives and Miracles: Gregory of Tours;* Kitchen, Hagiography and the cult of the saints.

34 Quesnel, *Venance Fortunat*; Roberts, Venantius Fortunatus' Life of St. Martin; Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, and now: Livorsi, *Venantius Fortunatus' Life of St Martin*.

35 See Pietri, *La ville de Tours,* including the archaeological evidence in her discussion.

36 On the partitions, see Wood, Kings, kingdoms and consent; Widdowson, Merovingian partitions; Becher, *Chlodwig,* 270-274; for a slightly different view, see Scholz, *Merowinger*, 83-84.

37 Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 89.

38 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.45 and 47, ed. Krusch and Levison, 180, 183.

39 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.1, ed. Krusch and Levison, 195.

40 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.4, ed. Krusch and Levison, 198-200.

neighboring diocese Nantes. The bishop, Felix, circulated a letter accusing Gregory's brother Peter of the murder of his competitor for the bishopric of Langres. According to Felix, this was the reason why Peter himself was killed soon thereafter. For Gregory, this was all a plot by Felix to take a possession of a *villa* that actually belonged to Tours.[41]

It must have been a rough start for Gregory as bishop of Tours.[42] However, Gregory was able to turn events to his advantage and sometimes even use his interim position in Tours to his and the city's benefit. After Chilperic eventually managed to establish control over Tours, Gregory used stories of his many altercations and clashes with the king to style himself in the role of a parrhesiast, a prophet before the king.[43] As Guy Halsall observed, this may well have been an orchestration from a time when Chilperic was already dead and the audience for these stories was not Gregory's historiographical bête noir Chilperic but his surviving brother and senior of the Merovingian family, King Gunthram.[44]

As long as Chilperic was alive, however, he most likely appreciated Gregory's social and familial network that spanned all over the various Merovingian kingdoms: to the Auvergne and Burgundy, where his paternal and maternal relatives had held their bishoprics, and to the Eastern court at Reims.[45] His close connections to the Eastern court and its elites continued to be important after the death of Chilperic in 584 to initiate the alliance of Chlothar I's surviving son, the Burgundian king Gunthram, with his young nephew and king of the Austrasian kingdom, Childebert. Gregory reports several times how he helped to mediate and to clear the air between the two kings.[46] In the beginning of book V, when Gregory starts to narrate the events which took place after he had been appointed bishop of Tours, we see him again in this role of a broker working amongst his wide social and political networks, not only on behalf of kings but also for other members of the governing class, fellow bishops, or for his city Tours and its people. When Tours once again belonged to the Austrasian kingdom and tax collectors came to the city, he reminded them and their king that the loyalty of the city depended on old agreements with the king's predecessors to release the city from taxes out of reverence for Saint Martin.[47]

In doing so, Gregory seems to have been a particularly successful negotiator between varied political and cultural groups. That he took on this role was not unusual; it was rather what was to be expected from a bishop in the sixth century. As we have already seen, the cooperation with the bishops of Gaul played an important role in the successful establishment of Clovis' rule over most of the former provinces of Gaul. Remigius even recommended it explicitly in his letter, and Clovis followed the advice, from the campaign against Syagrius

41 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.5, ed. Krusch and Levison, 200-202; for a longer discussion, see Reimitz, Genre and identity, 177-178.

42 For the context of the start of Gregory's episcopate, see Wood, Individuality, and Halsall, The preface to book V.

43 Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 42-47.

44 Halsall, Nero and Herod.

45 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*, 17-18.

46 A particularly good example is Gregory's role in the negotiation and conclusion of the treaty of Andelot: Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.20, ed. Krusch and Levison, 434, 440-441.

47 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 449.

to the conquest of the Visigothic kingdom in Aquitaine in 507[48] and the convening of the first general council of the Church of Gaul in Orléans shortly before his death in 511.[49] The acts of this first general council have come down to us in manuscripts that were copied in around 600 CE, about three generations later. In these and also later manuscripts, the letter that Clovis had written in 507 to the bishops of Aquitaine was now put at the beginning of the acts of the council of 511. To Clovis' letter of 507, the bishops responded with their letter, written after the council, asking the king for his confirmation of the council's decisions to confer even more authority upon them.[50]

The Reduction of Complexity and the Formation of a Post-Roman Culture in the Early Merovingian Kingdom

The alliance between kings and bishops proved to be a decisive factor in the formation of what Peter Brown has called a »religious governmental mood« that came to shape the Merovingian kingdom in the course of the sixth century.[51] It was a process that was certainly not always characterized by a harmonious cooperation between bishops and kings, and was indeed shaped by differing political interests, divergent coalitions and not least, competing claims for pastoral power.[52] The *Histories* of Gregory of Tours provide us with many examples, but so do many other sources of the time such as royal edicts, letters, conciliar decrees or hagiographical literature.[53] Whether through consensus, conflict or competition, this all contributed to the formation of a common ground in this post-Roman kingdom. In their alliance with the bishops, the kings could claim a shared responsibility for their Christian society; and as everyone was a sinner, both bishops and kings could claim that everyone was subject to their authority. As Brown noted, »so stark a view imposed a great simplicity on what, otherwise, were complex polities.«[54]

However, this complexity was real; and so too was the necessity to reduce it in order to allow for meaningful social interaction, as we have learned from Niklas Luhmann.[55] In this regard, different ideas for enabling cross-cultural connection emerged in the second half of the sixth century. They went hand in hand with significant changes in the social texture of Gaul during the lifetime of Gregory of Tours. It is precisely in Gregory's time that the extant sources allow us to grasp the self-image of a new post-Roman elite that had replaced the old

48 Cf. above, p. 109.

49 See Scholz, *Merowinger*, 62-68; *Concilum Aurilianense*, ed. Maassen, 1-14.

50 The »response« of the bishops is the introduction to the canons (*Concilium Aurilianense*, ed. Maassen, 2), Clovis' letter (cf. above, p. 109 n. 21) has not been included into the modern edition of the council.

51 Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, 144-147.

52 On pastoral power, see: Brown, From patriae amator, 89-90; Brown, *Eye of the Needle*, 506-507; see also: Suntrup, *Studien zur politischen Theologie*; Halfond, *Bishops*; Halfond, *Archaeology*; Esders and Reimitz, Gundowald; Wood, *Christian Economy*.

53 For recent discussions, see Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 144-179; Brown, *Eye of the Needle*, 481-526; Wood, *Christian Economy*; Stüber, *Der inkriminierte Bischof*; Halfond, *Bishops*; Scholz, *Merowinge*r, 106-117, 122-133.

54 Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 146.

55 For a brief summary, see Luhmann, *A Sociological Theory of Law*, 22-24; for a comprehensive discussion, see Luhmann, *Social Systems*, part. 103-136.

senatorial elites of the later Roman Empire. Some of them, like certain members of Gregory's familial network, were descendants of these senatorial elites of an earlier time.[56] But these individuals had become part of a new governing class comprising old Roman families, northern and southern elites, Bretons, Franks, Burgundians, and other barbarians who had come to live in Gaul.

Newcomers also mingled at the courts of the Merovingian kings. One such newcomer was Venantius Fortunatus, who came to Gaul in 566 on the occasion of the marriage of the Eastern Merovingian king Sigibert I with the Gothic princess Brunhild. Venantius, the Italian poet from Treviso, delivered an epithalamium to emphasize the international dimension of Sigibert's alliance with the Visigothic kings.[57] After that, Venantius stayed in the Merovingian kingdom, became the protégé of Gregory's family – mostly of Gregory himself – and built a successful career by writing poems for kings, bishops, secular elites and many members of the Merovingian upper class.[58] As Michael Roberts has shown, in his adoption of the panegyrical genre, Venantius developed new forms, forging »a new kind of praise poetry well suited to the conditions of reception in Merovingian Gaul«.[59]

The many extant poems reveal a wide array of recipients. He wrote for different members of the royal family, kings and queens, their children, for ecclesiastical elites, bishops, abbesses, abbots, and even for members of the secular elites. In poems for this last group, he sometimes praises – depending on their ancestry – their old Roman lineage or their noble barbarian ancestry as well as their social and political skills and competence. In the case of a certain Conda, the *conviva regis* Sigibert I, he does not mention his ancestry, but highlights Conda's skills in financial and military matters in a »presumably apposite compliment to a self-made man«.[60] Venantius carefully chose different registers, rhetorical figures and motifs to meet the expectations of the various members of the governing class and their diverse backgrounds.

There are, however, certain literary techniques that recur in Venantius' praise poetry, and one of those is the adaptation of Roman eloquence and its potential for the integration of a post-Roman diversity. Already in his poem celebrating the marriage of Sigibert with the Visigothic princess Brunhild as the union of Hispania and Germania, he compared the couple to Aeneas and Lavinia.[61] In a poem sent to Sigibert's brother Charibert, Venantius used an interesting mix of biblical and Roman models to praise the king's qualities as a just ruler – *publica iura gubernans*. For this, he is certain, the barbarians applaud him as much as the Romans.[62] Similarly, he praised the sense of justice of the next brother, Chilperic, who

56 Diefenbach, Bischofsherrschaft; Brown, *Eye of the Needle*, 494-498.

57 George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, 24-27; cf. now: Williard, *Friendship*, 157-164.

58 See now Williard, *Friendship*, 3-9, with further references.

59 Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, 38.

60 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII.16, ed. Leo, 170-172; trans. George, 65, n. 43.

61 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI.1, ed. Leo, 124.

62 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VI.2, ed. Leo, 131.

Venantius says is able to understand the different languages of his subjects without the aid of an interpreter, so that »a single tongue echoes back many languages of the nations«.[63]

Roman eloquence and cultural competence were equally important for other members of the governing class. It was the duke Lupus' eloquence that was of the greatest benefit to the people, as Venantius Fortunatus pointed out in one of his poems, for which the duke received applause from the barbarian with the lute, the Greek with epic lyric and the Briton with the *crotta*.[64] The praise of the *dux* of the Provence and *rector* of Marseille, Bodegisel, is likewise set in in different cultural contexts: Massalia and Germania were in competition to praise him, one demanding to have him, the other to have him back.[65] Another important member of the Eastern court, Chrodinus, was also praised for his popularity in different regions and among different groups of the Merovingian kingdom. All the *populi* praised him, and he was as committed to the *gentes* as he was esteemed by the *Romani*.[66] In an epitaph for Vilithuta, a noblewoman born in Paris who died early in childbirth, Venantius commended how she balanced her barbarian nature with Roman nurture.[67]

The poems Venantius wrote present him as a gifted cultural broker. They also show how he tried to convince his dedicatees that an updated *Romanitas* could provide common ground for their post-Roman society.[68] With this agenda he was not always as convincing as we would probably assume. A good example is the above-mentioned duke Lupus, whose origin from a noble *stirps Romana* Venantius highlighted prominently.[69] As we have seen, Venantius styled Lupus as the ideal leader of a post-Roman society who renewed *Romanitas* through his education and eloquence in different languages.[70] Lupus did indeed move with the times, but he did so quite differently from what Venantius may have had in mind. He actually passed on his name Lupus – the wolf – to his son in Germanic translation and called him Romwulf: the Roman wolf.[71]

The Publicity of Letters and the Publication of Gregory's Histories

Taken together, Venantius and his various dedicatees – whether they shared the poet's ideas and idealizations or not – allow us to get a sense of the remarkable cultural sophistication, competence and confidence of the governing class of the Merovingian kingdom in the last

63 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.1, ed. Leo, 203; trans. George, 78.

64 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII.7 and VII.8, ed. Leo, 159-163, here, 163. It is remarkable that with *crotta* for the instrument with which the Britons praise Lupus, Venantius uses a precise Celtic word (*crwth*, which originally meant a stringed instrument and maintained its meaning into modern Welsh as »violin« or »fiddle«), to designate a specific ethnic group that had emigrated to Gaul (the regions of what is today Brittany) in the last centuries of the Western Roman Empire. I thank Peter Brown for calling this detail to my attention.

65 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII.5, ed. Leo, 157

66 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IX.16, ed. Leo, 219.

67 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, IV.26, ed. Leo, 156.

68 See the discussion of Buchberger, Romans, barbarians and Franks.

69 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, VII.1, ed. Leo, 159.

70 Cf. above, n. 64.

71 Martindale, *Prosopography*, 798-810; Selle-Hosbach, *Prosopographie*, 127-128; see also Buchberger, *Shifting Ethnic Identities*, 134-136.

decades of the sixth century.[72] As many dedicatees and readers of the poet's work also belonged to Gregory's social and literary networks, we might assume that Gregory anticipated a similar audience for his historiographical and hagiographical works.[73] It is therefore unlikely that Gregory's anxiety about future readers keeping his works just as he had left them, both »intact and unchanged«, was based on his concern about declining cultural standards, or that this anxiety was the reason why he trusted his legacy with only his direct successors as bishops of Tours.

It might have been quite the reverse. Gregory ended his *Histories* with such a dramatic appeal because he anticipated the wider circulation of his works in the literary networks and cultural centers of the Merovingian kingdoms. In a manuscript culture, such a circulation of books required the production of copies. The wider Gregory's writings circulated, the less control any one person had over how they were copied, used and passed on. After all, Gregory had himself used the works of previous historians such as Jerome, Orosius, the Latin translation of Eusebius' Church history by Rufinus, or otherwise lost histories with concern for his purpose rather than for fidelity to the texts, »selecting some passages and omitting others«.[74] That Gregory anticipated a wider audience of his *Histories* than only his successors at Tours is also illustrated by the altercation with Felix, the bishop of Nantes, recounted in detail in Gregory's *Histories*. As briefly mentioned, Felix accused Gregory's brother of having killed the designated bishop of Langres, Sylvester, to get the latter out of his way so that he himself could become the bishop of the diocese.[75] As Gregory tells us in his *Histories*, Felix made these accusations in a letter sent to Gregory, to which Gregory responded to prove that the accusations were the baseless lies of a notorious slanderer. Recounting the exchange and his response in the *Histories* indicates that Gregory assumed he was not the only recipient of Felix's letter. If we believe Gregory, Felix launched the invectives only to put Gregory in a difficult position, which the bishop of Nantes hoped would help him gain possession of a *villa* belonging to the church of Tours. Like many other letter exchanges of the time, the one between Felix and Gregory was a public affair.[76] We can therefore assume that Gregory regarded his presentation of the dispute in the *Histories* as operating in the same public arena of literary and social networks that he shared with Felix.[77]

A hint to how Gregory expected his works to circulate may also be found in the above-mentioned preface to the *Histories,* in which he apologized to his readers for his unpolished style (*inculto effatu*). It was his own community (*a nostris*) that had encouraged him. To Gregory's

72 See Hen, *Roman Barbarians*; Pohl, Early medieval Romanitas; Diefenbach and Müller (eds.), *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter.*

73 Williard, *Friendship*, 25-65.

74 Cf. above the quote of Gregory's curse, p. 106 n. 4; for the lost histories in Gregory, see Van Hoof and Van Nuffellen, *The Fragmentary Latin Histories*, 81-98 (Sulpicius Alexander), 99-130 (Renatus Profutures Frigeridus).

75 See above, pp. 111-112 with n. 41.

76 See the recent excellent contributions by Flierman, Gregory of Tours and the Merovingian letter, and Gillett, Letters and communication networks, with further references to late antique and Merovingian letter cultures.

77 In other works, Gregory presents us with a much more positive image of Felix; and the bishop of Nantes was also the dedicatee of poems of Gregory's protégé Venantius Fortunatus; see the discussion and references in Williard, *Friendship*, 39 with n. 72.

own surprise, he had heard members of the community saying that the sophisticated language of rhetoricians was only understood by a few, but a more simple style by many: *philosphantem rhetorem intellegunt pauci, loquentem rusticum multi.*[78] With the emphasis on his *sermo rusticus*, Gregory used the topos that appears throughout the literary history of late Antiquity and among the works of the foremost authors of early Christian literature.[79] However, in using the topos, Gregory added a nuance with the phrase *philosphantem rhetorem intellegunt pauci, loquentem rusticum multi*. As observed by Walter Berschin, Gregory constructed it as a rhetorical clause. As Berschin also noted, this may not have been one of Cicero's preferred clauses, but it did present Gregory to insiders as capable of operating with different registers for different audiences.[80] To the insiders of his own community, the rhetorical clause may have served to convince members of his own network that they could trust him and his writings. This in turn helped to support the further distribution of his works by members of this inner circle, who passed the texts on to their wider social and literary networks. But as the works were disseminated beyond the communicative networks of Gregory's circle, the question of who would reproduce copies – and how they would do so – became less certain. A master copy in the archives of Tours carefully preserved by his successors would provide later generations with a version of his works that was »intact and unchanged« – just as he had left them.

In late Antique manuscript culture, preserving authentic or authoritative exemplars of texts seems to have been a common practice. One particularly well-known example is the Theodosian Code, of which master copies were made and kept in the archives of the highest officials of the empire.[81] The same was decreed about three generations later for the *Lex Romana Visigothorum*, the Roman law code of the Visigothic kingdom. At the beginning of the sixth century, it was ordered that copies of the law book would be sent out to the different cities and courts, but the original should remain as a master copy in the royal treasury.[82] Gregory's *Histories* themselves attest to this practice by including the example of a letter from the former queen and abbess of the monastery of Poitiers, Radegund, to the bishops of Gaul. At the end of this long letter, she asks the bishops to preserve her signed *supplicatio* in their archives to help and protect the monastic community after her death.[83] One of these bishops was Gregory, and he not only kept the letter in his archives but also included it in his *Histories*.[84]

78 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, preface, ed. Krusch and Levison, 1.

79 See already Goffart, *Narrators*, 117; Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 85-89; and now Wood, Registers of Latin, with further references.

80 Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil*, vol. 1, 298-299.

81 See Salway, The publication and application of the Theodosian Code; Salway, Publication of the Theodosian Code and transmission of its text.

82 *Lex Romana Visigothorum, Auctoritas Alarici regis*, ed. Hänel, 2-4.

83 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.42, ed. Krusch and Levison, 474; for a longer discussion, see now Fliermann, Gregory of Tours.

84 See the discussion of the Histories as an archive in Merrington, The building projects.

Diversity and Its Uses in Gregory of Tours' Histories

Although Gregory was well connected to the governing classes of the Merovingian kingdom, he certainly observed an increasing confidence of this newly established elite about their place and status in the kingdom and *this world*. As Peter Brown has perceptively argued, Gregory was rather concerned about these contemporary trends. The powerful, in Gregory's world,

> were no panic-stricken persons, living in a world of gathering gloom, far from it. They had put the Last Judgement out of their minds. From Gregory's point of view, they were the sort of persons who were notoriously difficult for any preacher of repentance to deal with. … They gave no thought to the coming judgement of Christ. Gregory wrote to remind them that the patience of God was not endless. Sooner or later, this judgement would come.[85]

As author of the *Histories* as well as an actor in his stories, Gregory continued to be a »spokesman of a Christian piety of repentance that reached back, without a break, to the last days of Augustine and to the preachers of fifth-century Provence«.[86] The continuity of such a penitential mood was actually supported or even intensified by the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire in the course of the fifth century.[87] It still played an important role in the formation of »little Romes« based on the cooperation between barbarian governors and their military elites with the Roman regional elites and the various leaders of the Christian church. As Merle Eisenberg has shown in his study on the Burgundian kingdom, Gregory as pastor built on many of the socio-religious experiments in the different Christian communities and dioceses of southern Gaul. In his *Histories* and his pastoral vision, however, Gregory connected these models to a different scale, namely the Church of Gaul as it had become established in the Merovingian regnum after Clovis.[88]

This probably explains the dominance of Gregory's *Histories* as the history of the early Merovingian kingdom in the centuries after his death. Every historian after him had to work with (or sometimes against) this new baseline for the formation of the Frankish kingdom.[89] Gregory found himself, however, confronted with a difficult challenge in composing his *Historia*. He had to make clear that his literary and pastoral agenda was not the kingdom in this world, but the one in the next. This meant maintaining a level of complexity that was repeatedly reduced and modified by later generations when rewriting the *Histories* in the following centuries. Its framework can still confuse modern historians.

Although Gregory was born into a senatorial family and might even have counted a Roman emperor among his ancestors, he was unwilling to connect the history of the Christian regnum to the origins of many of its features in the Roman Empire. [90] As Kathleen Mitchell has shown, Gregory was largely oblivious to the end of the Western Roman Empire. In

85 Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 156-157.

86 Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 157.

87 For this longer history, see Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*.

88 Eisenberg, *Building Little Romes*.

89 Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, part II.

90 See Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours*, 12-13, 23.

addition to that, the history of the Western Roman Empire before the end of the fifth century only provides a shallow background for the history that mattered to Gregory – the deep past of Christian Gaul, the history of martyrs, saints, and bishops of earlier Christianity.[91] The *imitatio imperii* of his contemporary king Chilperic was, from Gregory's point of view, a ridiculous farce.[92] When he compares the *Averni*, an army contingent of his hometown Clermont, with the Trojan heroes, he does so in a report of a devastating defeat of the troops against the Visigoths. Like the Trojans in the river Simois, the *Averni* perished in the Rhône and came back to the city »stripped of all their equipment, deprived of their horses and thoroughly ashamed of themselves«.[93] Gregory was even suspicious of the employment of Roman legal precedent to protect bishops from the persecution of secular authorities.[94] Unlike his friend Venantius Fortunatus, and probably some of his dedicatees, Gregory did not want to support the formation of a secular post-Roman discourse by borrowing from and making comparisons with Roman models, history and mythology. And as I have argued at greater length elsewhere, he also did not want to provide contemporaries like Lupus or his son Romwulf with a suitable Frankish prehistory.[95] In their pre-Christian history, the Roman senators and the pagan Franks were just the same – *fanatici*.[96]

In his efforts to convey the excitement of the rise of Christianity from the late Roman to the post-Roman world in his Histories, Gregory had no desire to define the regnum by any other scale than Christianity itself. It may well be that Gregory felt the need to respond to the expectations of members of the governing class who would have liked to identify more strongly than other groups and communities in the Merovingian world with an updated Romanitas or Frankishness, but his main strategy of maintaining the social, ethnic and cultural complexity of his world in order to emphasize the need for their integration in a truly Christian vision rendered him unwilling to meet these expectations for any group. The vision Gregory promoted was not based on a glorious past but oriented toward an uncertain future. The specific constitution of the post-Roman Merovingian kingdom provided ample scope for Gregory to emphasize the complexity of his social world, and he had no intention of reducing it by presenting stronger foci of identification in his history.

To give just a few examples: Of the forty-four times the name of the Franks appears in the *Histories* after the death of Clovis, there is not one instance that links the name of the Franks to the whole political or social framework of the Merovingian regnum. We hear of individual Franks who are members of the elite sent on political missions together with descendants of the senatorial class.[97] We hear of the Franks of Tournai who stay seated and keep drinking

91 Mitchell, Marking the bounds.

92 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.44, ed. Krusch and Levison, 252-254; see Reimitz, Contradictory stereotypes, 87-91.

93 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 163.

94 Reimitz, True differences.

95 Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 52-57.

96 *Senatores fanatici*: Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, I.31, ed. Krusch and Levison, 24; *Franci*: Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, II.10, ed. Krusch and Levison, 58.

97 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.40, ed. Krusch and Levison, 172.

past the end of the meal. Following this *mos Francorum* got the men so drunk that it was easy for the queen Fredegund to kill them.[98] Fredegund also had a member of the *seniores Franci* of Rouen murdered.[99] Two inhabitants of Tours with the Germanic names Sichar and Chramnesind, who were involved in a bloody conflict with each other, were presented by Gregory as *cives Toronici*.[100] A Burgundian army sent by King Gunthram against the Visigoths in Iberia consisted of soldiers from Byturgi (the militia of Bourges), Sanctonici (Saintes), Petrocoricis (Périgieux), Ecolesenensibus (Angoulême), various other cities and the *gentes* who lived across the Saône, Rhône and Seine.[101] The Saxons of Bayeux were attacked by the Bretons in response to a campaign by the Toronici, Pictavi, Baiocassini, Caenomannici and Andecavi, the military contingents of the cities of Tours, Poitiers, Bayeux, Le Mans and Angers.[102] We also hear of a Saxon duke, Chulderic, who even executed God's revenge before he himself had to pay for his sins,[103] and of two Saxon slaves who killed the merchant Cristoforus.[104]

Gregory likewise emphasized the social, cultural or ethnic diversity of his time when describing the members of the ecclesiastical and spiritual community in Gaul. Wulfilaic, who wanted to become a column saint in the region of Trier but eventually entered a monastery, was a Lombard.[105] The priest Senoch was *genere Taifalis*,[106] the abbot of the monastery of Menat, Brachio, came from Thuringia.[107] The abstinent Winnoch, whom Gregory ordained as priest at Tours to prevent him from going on a pilgrimage to Rome, was a Breton.[108] Despite the long-held assumptions that the bishops of the early Merovingian kingdom were mostly members of the senatorial class, Gregory's *Histories* tell us that they came from different backgrounds and origins.[109] Quintianus, who became bishop of Gregory's hometown, Clermont, and whom Gregory presents as remarkable in his generosity and nobility of spirit, was an immigrant from Africa.[110] Gregory's predecessor as bishop of Tours, Licinius, was a *cives Andecavus*.[111] Fronimius, who became first bishop in Agde in Septimania after his flight

98 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, X.27, ed. Krusch and Levison, 520.

99 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.31, ed. Krusch and Levison, 398-399.

100 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VII.47 and IX.19, ed. Krusch and Levison, 366-368 and 432-434.

101 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 393.

102 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.26, ed. Krusch and Levison, 232.

103 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VII.3 and X.22, ed. Krusch and Levison, 328 and 514.

104 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VI.46, ed. Krusch and Levison, 365.

105 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.15 ed. Krusch and Levison, 380-383.

106 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.8, ed. Krusch and Levison, 204.

107 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.12, ed. Krusch and Levison, 206-207.

108 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.21, ed. Krusch and Levison, 229.

109 For a more recent view, see Diefenbach, Bischofsherrschaft, and Patzold, Bischöfe; Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 494-495, 506.

110 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, II.36, ed. Krusch and Levison, 84-85; Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* 4, ed. Krusch, 223-227.

111 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, X.31, ed. Krusch and Levison, 531, for a longer discussion, see Patzold, Bischöfe, 523-543.

from the Visigothic kingdom in Vence, was originally from Bourges, and Gregory mentions him as *Biturigae urbis incola*.[112]

Bishops who are descendants of the senatorial class are often mentioned by Gregory if he wants to give examples of people absolutely unfit for a leading role in the church. An exception is members of his own family, who are set as a worthy contrast to the base behavior of the others. One particularly dramatic case is Priscus of Lyon, who became bishop after Gregory's uncle Nicetius. He is portrayed as a truly unworthy successor:[113] Not only did his wife continue to live with him after he took orders, but they both harassed, persecuted, and even killed many members of Nicetius' clergy and staff and replaced them with people who shared their distaste of Nicetius. Another particularly awful example is Cautinus:[114] He was a drunkard and exceedingly greedy, though he also cared for the Jews in his diocese. However, he did so not out of concern for their souls but because of the profit they made for him as traders. After Cautinus' death, the Jews also helped a senator's son named Eufrasius to bribe the king so as to be appointed as bishop of Clermont. According to Gregory, this Eufrasius was often quite generous with wine, particularly bestowing the drink upon barbarians, but he rarely helped the poor. More appropriate behavior for a member of a noble family is then depicted in the form of Gregory's uncle and *nutritor* Avitus, who was eventually elected bishop of Clermont.

The portrayal of Jews in Gregory's *Histories* aligns with Gregory's already demonstrated tendency to illustrate the diversity of his world.[115] The Jews appear in various social roles and positions. As traders they have excellent relationships with members of the governing classes, bishops (Cautinus), the senatorial class (Eufrasius), and even with the royal courts. In this context, Gregory presents a certain Priscus entering into a religious debate with King Chilperic. Priscus was sophisticated and made Chilperic look bad right from the start.[116] Fortunately Gregory was present too, but even the bishop of Tours was not able to convince Priscus to convert to Christianity. Priscus' stubbornness did not serve him well, and he was soon killed by the *Iudaeus conversus* Pathir.

The episode, however, does not present Priscus as an outsider. He and his family are portrayed as well integrated into the social and political fabric of the post-Roman kingdom. After Priscus was killed, one of his relatives took revenge by killing Pathir, as was to be expected of an honorable member of the Merovingian secular elite.[117] They blended into the

112 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.24, ed. Krusch and Levison, 443-444.

113 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.36, ed. Krusch and Levison, 168-169.

114 Gregory of Tous, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.35, ed. Krusch and Levison, 167.

115 See Stemberger, Gregor von Tours und die Stellung der Juden; for a convenient collection of passages, see Blumenkranz, *Les auteurs chrétiens latins*; and for a wider historical context: Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430-1096*.

116 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VI.5, ed. Krusch and Levison, 268-272; see the discussion in Keely, Arians and Jews, 110-111.

117 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VI.17, ed. Krusch and Levison, 286-287; for a comprehensive recent discussion, see Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder.

post-Roman Merovingian kingdom.[118] That was also true for Jews in their role as traders and money lenders. A certain Armenatarius, sharing the same name as Gregory's mother (though in the male version), came to Tours with another Jew and two Christians to redeem the bonds that two officials, the *comes* (count) Eunomius and his former *vicarius* (deputy) Iniuriosus, had sold, and which were to be paid out of the public taxes, the *tributa publica*. As the latter were probably unable or unwilling to pay, they lured the group into a trap and killed the two Jews as well as the Christians. Neither the two debtors nor Gregory were concerned with the differences between Jews and Christians in this episode. [119]

Gregory also presents the Jewish community at Orléans as part of the larger social texture of the city. They belonged to a huge crowd of people who welcomed King Gunthram with acclamations when he celebrated the feast of Saint Martin on July 4 in the city. »And here the Syrian language, there that of the Latins, and again that even of the Jews, sounded together strangely in varied praises, saying: »Long live the king; may his reign over the peoples (*gentes*) last unnumbered years.«[120] Gregory singles out the Jews, who added their own acclamations, declaring »May all the peoples (*omnes gentes*) honor you and bend the knee and be subject to you.«[121] He then points out that the king in his wisdom saw through these praises and suspected that the Jews actually wanted him to use public funds to restore the synagogue that had been torn down by Christians some time ago. As Ulrich Wiemer has shown, acclamations could play an important role in the Roman system of petitioning the governor or emperor. There was even a formal procedure to put them into writing and send the record as a petition to the authorities.[122] Hence, it is likely that Gunthram was right. The Jews were indeed trying to prepare a petition and took advantage of the procedural right to appeal that Clovis had granted three generations ago and which had been developed further by his successors – thus participating in the political traditions of the realm.[123]

Like any other group in the Merovingian kingdom, Gregory presented the Jews as a quite diverse community. What mattered was not their social roles or their past but the choices they made. After Avitus of Clermont converted 500 Jews in the city, Gregory's protégé Venantius wrote a poem to celebrate their conversion, most likely based on Gregory's account of it.[124] In his poem, Venantius emphasized how Avitus used the shared experience of the Old Testament to bridge the divide between Christians and Jews and convince the latter to

118 For an excellent discussion of this, see Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder, who, however, also highlights how the story reflects the knowledge of both sides of Jewish-Christian polemics.

119 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VII.23, ed. Krusch and Levison, 343-344.

120 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.1, ed. Krusch and Levison, 370-371, for discussions, see Rose, Gregory of Tours and the conversion of the Jews; Claude, Gregor von Tours und die Juden; Reydellet, La conversion de Juifs de Clermont; Goffart, The Conversion of Avitus; Brennan, Conversion of the Jews; Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder.

121 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.1, ed. Krusch and Levison, 370.

122 Wiemer, Akklamationen im spätrömischen Reich.

123 Cf. above pp. 109-110.

124 Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.5, ed. Leo, 107-112.

join the community of the former.[125] Gregory's account reveals a more differentiated picture. Avitus had actually taken the initiative after some Jews had tipped rancid oil on one member of their community during the ceremony of his baptism. This was a pointed inversion of Christian baptismal anointment. As Ephraim Shoham-Steiner has shown, Gregory understood that, as well as other probably less obvious elements of Jewish polemic against Christianity.[126] He had, after all, his own debates with members of the Jewish community, such as the one mentioned above with Priscus at the court of Chilperic.[127] In Gregory's portrayal of the conversion at Clermont, it was actually this incident that initiated the larger initiative of Bishop Avitus. He presented the whole community with a choice: conversion or exile. While 500 chose conversion to Christianity, another part of the community emigrated to Marseille.[128]

Conclusion

The examples I have presented in this article may have helped to provide an impression of the vivid panorama of a socially, ethnically and culturally highly diverse society that Gregory describes in his *Histories*. As we have seen, the presentation of this diversity was deliberate – and it was not fictional. It was, as he said in his general preface, a world that Gregory and his contemporaries shared.[129] In some cases he may have wanted to portray these contemporaries, many of whom belonged to his own social network, accurately. In the overall arc of his historiographical project, however, the emphasis on this diversity was above all important to highlight the need for a shared vision of Christendom that could accommodate this diversity and hold together the different communities, and various social, cultural, regional or local identities. The major and minor differences might also have been important to the different members of his own network. The elaboration of these different expectations in the *Histories* helped to underline not only their integration in a Christian world but also the role Christianity could play in their preservation and cohesion in the present and future.

The result was a complex patchwork of histories and case studies about various interest groups and individuals – and not least Gregory's own family network. The view of earlier historiography that regarded Gregory's histories as an unstructured collection of stories by a historian of the Dark Ages who was overwhelmed by his task is one way of reducing their

125 Brennan, Conversion of the Jews, 330, but cf. the much more comprehensive discussion in Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder.

126 Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder; with his characteristic generosity, Peter Brown brought a rare example of an extant Jewish polemic against Christianity from the sixth century to my attention, *Controverse d'un évêque*, ed. Schlossberg, (critically) reviewed and discussed in Esbroeck, Der von einem Bischof um 514 geschriebene Brief.

127 See above, p. 121, n. 116, and for an insightful discussion regarding to which elements and arguments of Jewish discourse Gregory could have been responding here, Shoham-Steiner, Revisiting the murder.

128 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.11, ed. Krusch and Levison, 205-206; for an excellent discussion of the continuing instrumentalization of the histories of Jewish conversions at Clermont, particularly in the seventh century, see Savill, Civic factions; for an overview: Fray, La présence juive.

129 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, preface, ed. Krusch and Levison, 1.

complexity.[130] Another possibility, however, is the more recent view of Gregory as a meta-textual demiurge who, in his manipulative presentation, gives us only his individual view and interests.[131] Both ways of interpreting Gregory have one thing in common. Whether one sees Gregory as an overwhelmed historian in a cultural desert at the dawn of the Dark Ages, as a brilliant satirist, or as a Christian prophet with a vision for the future, these interpretations all largely isolate the author and his stories from both their present and their history.

Yet Gregory's rich and multifaceted *Historia* provides us with much more. As Peter Brown has put it so beautifully: »In the stories recounted in Gregory's *History* we not only hear the voice of the master. We catch the tones of the governing class going about its business in a distinctive way.«[132] As I have tried to show with a few examples, Gregory's literary strategies do indeed mirror the social and political maneuvers of his time, as well as the playing field that the formation of the Merovingian kingdom provided for them. Gregory's desire to show the potential for Christianity to integrate the diversity of his society gives us a unique view of the complexity and multiplicity of the quickly and constantly changing world in the century after the end of the Western Roman Empire. However, the complexity of this approach was as high as that of the society for which he wrote. Hence Gregory anticipated and reacted to alternative and, for Gregory, probably too far-reaching reductions of social complexity. The responses and reactions to such views allow us to reconstruct the spectrum of possibilities not only for the writing of history, but also for the debates about how to reconfigure the categorial infrastructure and to manage diversity in the vast and heterogenous regions of the post-Roman Merovingian kingdom.

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130 See, for instance, Wattenbach and Levison, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen*, 100-106.

131 Goffart, *Narrators*; for a critique of exploring Gregory and other late antique and early medieval historians as »meta-textual demiurgs«, see already Pohl, Paulus Diaconus.

132 Brown, Gregory of Tours, 19.

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