Histos 18 (2024) XII–XLVII

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

GREGORY OF TOURS AND THE VARIETIES OF DEATH

Allen E. Jones, *Death and the Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours: Religion and Society in Late Antique Gaul.* Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages 6. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. Pp. 324. Hardback, €109.00. ISBN 978-94-6298-804-0.

The book under consideration here bears a marvellous cover. The stark image of a large skull emerges out of a charcoal background that fills the upper half. This portion is set off from the title below and the remaining surface of blue and beige, as if the bony chunk at the top rests in a box-like darkness all its own. Burial from an insider's perspective, how it might look from a 'skull-socket's' view, comes to mind. So do the words of Peter Brown: 'Gregory's world is full of tombs'.[1]

That arresting observation points to the prominent role that objects of the dead, particularly the holy dead, play in the writings of Georgius Florentius Gregorius, the bishop, hagiographer and historian, who is known today as Gregory of Tours (538–94). A Gallo-Roman with a distinguished Christian ancestry, Gregory gives special attention to those mortuary receptacles that bear miraculous power, the sarcophagi of saints. These objects belong to his world almost naturally, as much a part of it as the flora of Frankish Gaul.[2] They also have a kind of 'agency', drawing Gregory and many others to them.[3] It is hard to imagine him getting along without them. In principle if not in practice, they keep his world 'ethically functional'.[4]

Triumph and Prop

The episcopal see of Tours, which Gregory assumed in 573, included one of Western Europe's most famous cult sites, the resting place of Saint Martin. Although Gregory is best-known for 'his ten books of histories', commonly

[1] Brown (1982) 223.

[2] Cf. Van Dam (1993) 112 n. 131; Ragon (1983) 116–17; Brown (1982) 227.

[3] Bille (2013) 138–42.

[4] Kleinberg (2008) xi.

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though inaccurately called *The History of the Franks*, he also wrote four books recording the many miracles that occurred at Martin's shrine, along with other compositions dedicated to saints and the activities at their tombs.[5] In Gregory's reports of the encounters between the living and their divine patrons, encounters that most often entail healing miracles, the tomb becomes an extension of the holy person.[6] It assumes a humanness and a humanity. 'I received my health from the tomb' (*sanitatem recipi de tumulo*, *VM* 2.1), Gregory says when recounting the fever and severe abdominal pain that were soothed after he ingested dust from Martin's sarcophagus. On several occasions, when Gregory recounts pilgrims approaching this same sarcophagus, he mentions that they 'fell at the feet of Saint Martin' (*ad pedes sancti Martini*). The tomb is the saint.

To regard a 'thing' of death as a person offered a way of reconfiguring, of re-imagining, not just mortuary receptacles but also their content.[7] Of course, holy fragments in reliquaries performed the same task of reconfiguring and re-imagining mortal remains. To say the obvious, this project of pressing the material of death into expressions of everlasting life occupied the church. As Robert Bartlett notes, 'Of all religions, Christianity is the one most concerned with dead bodies'.[8] By addressing that concern, the saint's tomb affirmed salvation for believers. In one way or another, 'resurrection' happened there.[9] What one historian said of early Christian Gaul in general, though not without offering significant reservations, may apply to the saint's tomb in particular: 'the triumph of Christianity was the triumph of the sarcophagus'.[10]

[5] See the bibliography for the standard Latin editions of Gregory's works. The following abbreviations are used for the Gregorian texts quoted or cited here:

Histories = *Historiarum libri X*
VM = *De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*
GC = *Liber in gloria confessorum*
GM = *Liber in gloria martyrum*

For important observations on the Latin editions of Gregory's writings, see: Shanzer (2005) 304–6; de Nie (2015) 859–60; and especially Bourgain (2016) 141–58.

[6] Bille (2013) 137–42.

[7] Cf. Johnson (2008) 6.

[8] Bartlett (2013) 3.

[9] Ambrose of Milan underscores resurrection in *Ep.* 77.2, which describes the miraculous events associated with the discovered burial of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius in 386. Augustine also saw the miracles associated with the cult of the martyr Stephen as an affirmation of resurrection: *De civ. D.* 22.8–9. On Augustine's change of view regarding miracles: Bavel (1995) 351–61. On resurrection in the context of Gregory's miracle stories: Van Dam (1993) 85, 91, 109–14.

[10] As Griffe (1965) 3.51 notes, 'l'usage de l'incinération n'avait pas encore disparu … Les chrétiens répudiant l'incinération, le triomphe du christianisme fut le triomphe du sarcophage, mais, ici encore, les thèmes chrétiens ne s'imposèrent pas d'emblée et le

Gregory also gives the impression that he appreciated tombs for what they were: magnificent objects. Even his passing references to the tombs of the anonymous dead tell us something important, since they give us an impression of the bulk and abundance of 'Christian materiality'.[11] We even get a sense of what the experience from that 'skull-socket's view' would be like. As Gregory tells us (*Histories* 4.12), the priest Anastasius, embroiled in a property dispute with Bishop Cautinus, was captured by the latter's men and taken to a church in Clermont. The crypt of this church held a large and old sarcophagus. Forced into the unwieldly container, Anastasius was put on top of a man long dead. To get out, the doomed cleric needed some astonishing good luck, so astonishing that Gregory believed the hand of God must have been at work in what transpired. 'Confident' (*fidi*) that their prisoner had been 'crushed' by the heavy cover (*lapide premeretur*), the captors left the tomb and stationed themselves at the crypt door. It was 'winter' (*hiems*). The place must have been cold since the guards 'made a fire' (*accenso igne*) and drank some 'warmed wine' (*vino calido*). Then 'they fell asleep' (*obdormiunt*). Meanwhile, Anastasius was still alive among the fetid remains. Fortunately, his captors left behind a 'crowbar' (*vectem*), which had been used to remove the ponderous cover before they put him inside. As they slept, Anastasius found that he had just enough space to move around, for the sarcophagus, Gregory reminds us, was quite 'big' (*spatiosum*). Groping in the tomb's darkness, he reached up and felt their tool lodged between the container's upper edge and lid. After considerable prying, breath-holding, nose-plugging, and praying, he managed to move the massive slab on top just enough to pop his head up and squirm out. Once free, he made his way to another door of the crypt. It was 'shut with strong bars and sturdy nails' (*seris fortissimus clavisque firmissimis obseratum*), but the door itself was not a solid construction. Peering 'between the planks' (*inter tabulas*), Anastasius spotted 'a man walking by' (*hominem viam praetereuntem*), whom he 'quietly' (*voce tenui*) asked for help. The passer-by 'took an axe' (*secure manu tenens*) and cut through the door. Anastasius got out, went home, found the title-deeds for his property, and headed to King Lothar. The ruler agreed that the land belonged to Anastasius. A happy ending to be sure, though as Anastasius used to tell Gregory, the 'deadly stench' had penetrated him so deeply, it 'shook his insides' (*fetor letalis … interna viscerum quatiebat*)![12]

christianisme n'apparut pas toujours en toute évidence.' More recently, Rebillard (2009) 85 has shown that religious beliefs, especially the Christian belief in resurrection, were not the primary factors leading to the gradual abandonment of cremation starting at the end of the third century. See also: Feffer and Périn (1987) 168–9; Mutie (2015) 178–9; Effros (2003) 86–7, 166, 188–9.

[11] On the subject, see, in general, Bynum (2011).

[12] Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

Gregory also aligns this spectacular story with another famous escape. Inserting a biblical phrase into the account, he associates Anastasius with the prophet who, swallowed by a whale, spent three days inside the creature before he was cast out thanks to God's intervention. 'Like a new Jonah' (*tamquam novus Ionas*), Anastasius was delivered from the tomb 'as if from the belly of hell' (*velut de ventre inferi*, Jonah 2:3). Something else also deserves noting. Cautinus, the person who orchestrated the capture and horrific treatment of Anastasius, got away. He fled, 'defeated and confused' (*victus confususque*) when Anastasius confronted him in the presence of the King. All these events are recounted in Book 4, Chapter 12 of the *Histories*, where Gregory blackens the character of this bishop. Cautinus was 'often drunk' (*plerumque … infundabatur potu*) and completely given over to 'greed' (*avaritiae*). 'Nothing was sacred' (*nihil sancti*) to him. He showed no interest in 'literature', whether 'sacred or profane' (*de omnibus enim scripturis, tam ecclesiasticis quam saecularibus, adplene immunis fuit*). He was also friendly with Jews who, Gregory claims, sold him goods 'at a higher price' than they were worth (*maiori quam constabant pretio venundabant*). Thus, the episode ends with Anastasius free and vindicated while his cruel adversary flees. But later Gregory says more about the main culprit. We find out how Cautinus ultimately fared when we reach Chapter 31. There we learn that he left his residence at Clermont to avoid a plague, whose initial symptom is a 'snake-shaped sore on the groin or armpit' (*in inguene aut in ascella vulnus in modum serpentis*). As Gregory tells us in his typical deadpan fashion, Cautinus returned to Clermont and died of the very pestilence he had tried to escape.

As we may infer from the story of Anastasius, the tombs that fill Gregory's world also give it splendid textures. But these receptacles share a stage. The narrative about Anastasius shows that the sarcophagus plays one part in an elaborate story, whose layers include land ownership, ecclesiastical architecture, the Bible, tools, expectations for clerical literacy, Jewish merchants, and, ultimately, the death of the vile bishop who had put the tomb to such a cruel use. With the villains outsmarted and the protagonist safely restored after a breath-taking escape, this action-packed episode would hardly be out of place in a James Bond movie. Now we come upon another way to see tombs: Though important in their own right, tombs are also props for Gregory's many anecdotes, part of an extensive repertoire used to highlight *Mors* (personified in the book under discussion), who appears in wide-ranging scenarios. Put differently, this bishop of Tours packed his texts with accounts that in one way or another involve death. Pilgrims, sometimes barely alive, seeking cures at sacred graves; funeral processions; saintly detritus in reliquaries; signs of doom in the sky; the fatal demise of royals; singing ghosts; conversations held by the deceased; revenants who appear in dreams; incorruptible holy corpses; slaves buried alive by a cruel master; the desecration of a slain enemy; a heretic dying on the privy; wars; murderous plots; floods; earthquakes; landslides; famine;

blood-rain; plagues; feuds; suicide; and, of course, the sheer materiality of tombs, along with, as we have seen, putrefaction: these are the kinds of elements that went into some of Gregory's many stories. Out of such material he created a world charged with mortality. Thus, the dying and the dead—even if the latter are often martyrs and confessors still at work as 'metapersons' in human affairs—populate this world, regularly appearing in the accounts that comprise Gregory's *Histories*, miracle stories, and saints' lives.[13] To focus on death in a study of this literature makes good sense.

But like a secret well kept precisely because it hides in plain sight, the prominent role death plays in Gregory's books might elude our gaze;[14] and even if we do notice it, we might not look long enough to appreciate its significance. After all, some pressing questions have been competing for our attention, questions whose answers have led to major shifts in our understanding of Gregory's compositions. Did he write as a 'naive' reporter, whose 'jumbled mosaic' of stories mirrored his allegedly chaotic times? Or did he act as a clever satirist whose distorted representations fixed on extremes, the wickedness of sinners and the goodness of saints? Then again, could he have been a theologian subtly injecting Augustinian ideas into narratives that showed the drama of a salvation history playing out in Christian Gaul?[15] And these are just some of the issues addressed by leading commentators who have offered comprehensive explanations of Gregory's work. Their fresh and deeply knowledgeable interpretations, however different they may be, captured the ingenious thinking and deft rhetorical strategies of a Latin author who had once 'advertiz[ed]' his literary deficiencies.[16] The valuable perspectives and critical reflection coming out of such productive clashes have also left their mark on the illuminating book of Allen E. Jones.

Seeing the Man in the Boy

Even from the brief background just presented, we can see that death figures prominently in Gregory's world, that his writing responds to it in wide-ranging

[13] See Lambek (2021) 8–9, with prefacing comments from Anderson (at viii), who includes in the category of metapersons 'spirits, deities, demons, saints, and other human-like figures'.

[14] Cf. Derrida (1999) 61.

[15] For fundamental surveys of the scholarship, see: de Nie (1987); Goffart (2005), whose views on satire are revisited in the 'Preface to the Paperback Edition' (at xxii); and Heinzelmann (1994); citations of Heinzelmann's 1994 study follow the pagination of both texts, the German first, then the English of Carroll's 2001 translation, with each separated by a slash (/). On the question of Augustine, crucial to the book under discussion here, see also Heinzelmann (2016a).

[16] Goffart (2005) 145; Heinzelmann (1994) 84–90/94–101.

ways, from the monuments signifying it to the holy corpses defying it; and it makes an appearance in at least one adventure story. Clearly, the subject engaged him. Some of the crucial, specific ways it did so occupy the book before us. To use the author's own words, the inquiry 'consider[s] how death acted as a catalyst for Gregory conducting his pastoral work, initiating his writing program, and imagining a Christian afterlife according to his own fashion' (16). The pursuit of these themes, with its sustained focus on Gregory's texts, also involves a critical aim: to challenge scholarship that sees the writings of Augustine as a major influence on Gregory's work. In light of that task, Jones proposes an 'alternative concept: Gregory's corpus is not the result of Gregory's encounter with Augustinian literary musings; rather, it is a literary effort borne out of a gradual process of an individual seeking to give meaning to a lifetime of experiences in Gallic society' (16). In other words, the promising turn to mortality opens up another perspective from which to view and evaluate the often-contested scholarship that has tried to uncover the meanings that Gregory's literary corpus encodes.

Jones begins by pinpointing where the field currently stands. A 'new near-consensus' has emerged. Taking the wide-ranging papers contained in two 'massive compendia' dedicated to Gregory as representative of this recent consensus, the author highlights what now appears to be settled: 'Gregory was an avid and expert promoter of saints' cults, an ecclesiastic fully enmeshed in the politics of his day, an accomplished hagiographer, and a talented historian capable of embedding sophisticated theological messages into a work of history' (14). In contrast to the 'low estimations' earlier commentators once offered, more recent scholarship has discovered 'new and improved Gregories'. As Jones shows, we now have a deep font to draw from—a steady flow of studies 'reassessing Gregory' over the last 'four decades'. Hence the Introduction, with its delineation of the earlier positions in heavily annotated pages, offers an excellent starting point for readers coming fresh to this major writer. Seasoned students of Gregory will also find the introduction captivating, for it announces a striking position meant to correct a tendency in the scholarship on Gregory, a tendency Jones finds represented in the work of one of Gregory's most accomplished expositors, Martin Heinzelmann. Before considering more directly the nature and implications of the argument, this discussion will survey the central points of the core chapters that make up the book's two main parts, the first of which treats Gregory's formation, the second considers the afterlife status of leading characters in his narratives.

Chapter 1 focuses on the record Gregory has left of his early life, a move anticipated by the Introduction's announcement that 'this book will involve an unabashed element of what some may characterise as "intellectual biography"' (17). While Gregory's childhood was 'possibly idyllic' (32), his early experiences nonetheless attuned him to the ways in which death could break into life. Its initial entrance was harmless but filled with meaning: Gregory

noted that he came into the world on the anniversary of Saint Andrew's death. This 'coincidence of births' gave Gregory 'reason to reflect on how he was inescapably associated with the living dead' (28). But he also saw how easily sickness threatened the lives of those dear to him. He learned at a young age, when his father suffered from gout, to seek help from heavenly patrons. Even the lark of an annual family pilgrimage to the rural shrine of the martyr Julian, in Brioude, might become an anxious occasion requiring divine intervention. On one trip, as Gregory tells us, his brother Peter nearly succumbed to a fever. At the church dedicated to Julian, Peter recovered after prayers and contact with dust from the tomb. On another excursion to the same spot, Gregory himself sought relief from a headache and fever by putting his head in the spring where Julian had been decapitated. That Gregory's illness might not have been as life-threating as his brother's hardly matters. To Jones such episodes reveal how 'reliance on saintly *virtutes* [miracles] had completely won over the impressionable youngster during the first decade of life' (31).

Other reports show Gregory's closer brushes with his own mortality. While still *in adolescentia*, he experienced a painful fever and stomach ache. He asked his mother to bring him to the tomb of Saint Illidius in Clermont. Once there, he vowed to become a cleric if cured. In spite of Gregory's expression of confidence in the saint's healing power, this episode suggests to Jones that the 'young Gregory in actuality may have been so fearful of dying, he felt taking the extreme measure of turning his life over to the church was the only action which could possibly secure his survival' (35). The vow marks a turning point whose significance grows in importance if we accept what Jones proposes, that Gregory's parents had not intended a clerical life for their son (33–4).

As the author realises, not all researchers will endorse an approach to this Merovingian writer that uses 'intellectual biography' (17 n. 19). At the same time, the turn to the autobiographical passages in Gregory's works by earlier commentators has been illuminating. Raymond Van Dam, for instance, has offered valuable observations on the way illness punctuated major transitions in Gregory's life.[17] Along similar lines, Jones examines the autobiographical accounts of infirmity in Gregory's hagiography. He identifies a behavioural pattern that would leave its mark on Gregory's religious practice and outlook: the faithful must appeal to celestial intermediaries, almost all of whom are dead saints, when they need deliverance not only from illness but all manner of misfortune, whether one is about to be mugged or run out of beer.[18] Thus the Christian survival strategies that Gregory learned at an early age continued

[17] Van Dam (1993) 91–3; see also: Wood (2002) 29–46; Heinzelmann (1994) 7–83/7–93; id. (2016b) 7–34.

[18] Mugging: *GM* 83, with Jones 39. *GC* 1 offers a rare account of angels, who miraculously replenish a supply of beer.

to be developed and refined as he matured. Once we are given the boy, the intellectual biographer can show us the man.

In fact, the second chapter, which treats Gregory's clerical life before he assumed the episcopacy in 573, echoes the first in one important respect: family members, especially clerical relatives, again play an enormous role in shaping the person who would become the bishop of Tours. His uncle Gallus, cured of a wound through the intercession of Saint Julian, had taught Gregory to look for signs of divine forces at work in human affairs. In the household of Gallus, who was the bishop of Clermont, Gregory was entrusted to a teacher, Avitus, who would lead his pupil into another world of signs, the hidden meanings contained in Scripture, especially the Psalms. Introduced to this biblical source at an early age, when his family recited its verses together, Gregory's study of such texts eventually led him 'to unlock their spiritual meaning' (67).

Other avuncular bishops shaped the person who would oversee Gaul's most illustrious religious centre, the Turonian church that housed Martin's tomb. Based on his examination of the sources, Jones believes Gregory frequently visited Burgundian relatives, including his great uncle Tetricus, bishop of Langres (68–9). From Tetricus 'it seems likely' that Gregory learned of 'divinatory rituals', such as the *sortes biblicae*. Although he cannot always be certain about the extent of Tetricus's influence, Jones believes this uncle played a crucial role in exposing Gregory to what may be regarded as the more performative aspects of Christianity at this time. Clerically orchestrated prison-freeings, the healing of demoniacs, and the appearance of an incorruptible saintly corpse were notable events in Tetricus's life. These occurrences would have marked the young Gregory, who later included such stories in his own writings. In Jones's estimation, then, the influence of clerical relatives was deep and enduring. The process of 'becoming Gregory' (36–49, 66–76) largely depended on such figures, whose instruction sensitised him to the way divine power breaks into human affairs, especially at critical moments. For Jones, these familial figures—not Augustine—are the ones who moulded the future bishop's own pastoral care and worldview.

The remaining part of the second chapter takes up the literary studies that would also shape Gregory. From 'his teens to early thirties', he was 'progressing in the *studium ecclesiasticae scriptae* under Avitus's tutelage' (76). From Gregory's own comments, we know that he was familiar with the hagiographical dossier of Saint Martin. The earlier accounts of Sulpicius Severus, along with other authors who wrote about this saint, gave Gregory 'much to chew on when it came time for him to develop his own image of Saint Martin' (85). The other major literary influence came primarily from an interpretive technique for reading Scripture. With the earlier writings of Orosius and Prudentius as his guide, Gregory learned to look to the 'visible world' to uncover a 'divine plan' whose record the Bible contained. To determine how this plan found its fulfillment, Gregory viewed Scripture through a specific

exegetical lens, typological interpretation. This is the 'practice of identifying how particular people and events within the Bible prefigure subsequent people and events in the same text' (79).

The technique offers a way of understanding not only Scripture, but also occurrences during Gregory's own time, as the description of Anastasius as a 'new Jonah' shows. In the third chapter, Jones takes up the use of typology by astutely linking a biblical scene to particular circumstances. Noting the way Gregory's *Histories* 'glossed over' Adam and Eve's sin and instead focussed on Cain's killing of Abel, Jones highlights the connection between Gregory's emphasis on a biblical murder and the devastating experience of war in the Touraine at the beginning of his episcopacy: 'Gregory may have imagined Cain's parricidal action a particularly appropriate *typus* for all subsequent human crimes during and in the aftermath of the civil warfare he witnessed …' (116).

The consequences of this warfare are far-reaching, for the book's position becomes strikingly apparent when Jones considers the impact of such violence. Following the position of Guy Halsall, Jones maintains that Gregory started writing his *Histories* because of the deadly violence in the Touraine, with those responsible for such destruction targeted (though not named) in the prologue that now appears as the opening to the fifth book of Gregory's historiographical masterpiece. As specialists know, to see Gregory's *Histories* beginning in his early episcopacy, during the time of warfare in the region, is a debatable view, about which more will be said later. The issue at stake, however, is not simply one concerned with the chronology of Gregory's compositions. As we can see, the question of genre assumes importance when Jones treats the condemnation of civil strife in the prologue to Book 5. *Mors* is Gregory's 'catalyst' for the writing of history. As Jones argues, the experience of widespread destruction caused by vying royal factions led Gregory to turn his attention to historiography, in addition to the hagiographical work he had already started at the beginning of his episcopate. Hence 'Death's rampage over the Touraine compelled' Gregory to take up another genre: 'The turbulence in and around Tours during the first years of his episcopacy most likely inspired him to add history to his literary repertoire' (104, 111).

Readers will have noticed the phrase 'most likely' in the sentence just quoted. Such wording suggests that the argument Jones gives for Gregory's turn to historiography may not be ironclad. After all, Gregory never explicitly states that the bloody strife prompted him to start composing his massive *Historiarum libri X*. But for the moment, debates over the dating of Gregory's compositions need to be put aside, if only for the sake of appreciating what Jones does when linking the experience of death to Gregory's historical work. In making that connection, Jones is rigorously adhering to the methodological stance that informs the entire book. This stance may be summarised by the following assertions: Gregory himself gives us enough information to

understand his thinking and the meaning of his writings; his texts are the product of events he experienced rather than pensive creations that came from reading Augustine; these experiences leading to the genesis of his major compositions may be pieced together from the autobiographical features that surface in his texts, which present his early formation and also the dangerous circumstances in which he took up the episcopacy. As the summary and book's title indicate, the answers we seek lie almost exclusively in Gregory's own words, on his 'pages', not in sources beyond them. A corrective undertone therefore marks not only Jones's position on Gregory's reason for writing history, but the entire study. In short, a careful and sustained treatment of his texts, a treatment wary of finding answers in Augustine to explain Gregory's outlook, will yield the surest results in the advancement of our knowledge. Put differently, 'to get Gregory right', as Jones says in the Introduction, requires an approach that sticks to the literature this bishop wrote. If the book had a rallying cry for a subtitle, it would be *ad fontes Gregorianos!* In keeping with that call, Jones does not often venture outside the Gregorian sources. As for the turn to Augustine, while it may not be a dead end for Jones, that move appears almost like a stumbling block in the effort to 'get Gregory right'. There is a sound reason for taking such a stance: as Jones notes, Gregory never explicitly mentions Augustine (115).

Putting Saints and Sinners in Their Place

More will be said shortly about the question of Augustine. For now, let us acknowledge that the close focus on Gregory's Latin texts becomes especially profitable as the book advances. If the first portion occasionally makes arguments, however carefully made, based more on what the textual evidence may plausibly point to rather than what it indisputably shows, the second section leaves no doubt about the validity of Jones's approach. For here he uncovers the rhetorical strategy by which Gregory assigned figures to their eternal afterlives. The findings are hard-won, discovered by an intense scrutiny of the rhetorical patterns detectable in Gregory's prose. Jones's attentiveness to textual matter—including a statistical account of certain words used to describe the deaths of figures mentioned in the sources—enables him to identify the verbal techniques Gregory deployed to convey the post-mortem destinations of the characters we meet in his writings. The fourth and fifth chapters, which make up the bulk of the second section, show us how Gregory encoded the reward or punishment of those who had died and whose final moments he often recounted.

To inform his readers of a person's post-mortem status, Gregory consistently relies on a narrow range of sometimes subtle expressions to signal who attains paradise and who suffers hell. Those in the former group outweigh the

latter. They are primarily addressed in Chapter 4, where Jones identifies the 'specific vocabulary' Gregory used to insinuate a soul's heavenly reward. In agreement with Heinzelmann, Jones notes that *migrare* 'represented Gregory's "usual term for a good Christian death"' (153, 155). According to Jones's reckoning, *migrare* appears 'approximately 94 times to imply a positive afterlife result for the deceased' (153). Of this number, sixty-one 'refer to the deaths of saints'. Similarly, *transire/transitus* offered another way to express the gaining of paradise, especially in the case of Martin, whose death Gregory mentions on forty-five occasions. Of that number, Gregory uses *transitus/transire* twenty-five times to convey this saint's post-mortem destination, 'while seven of twenty remaining references [to Martin's passing] employ *migrare*' (165). Likewise, 'out of 85 total uses of *transitus/transire*' in the context of death, '59 refer to the demise of saints'. As Jones shows, Gregory is consistent when conveying the otherworldly existence of the characters whose souls had been rewarded: 'As with *migrare*, the occasions in which Gregory used *transire* in reference to the death of an unsavory person are exceedingly rare, only two. Interestingly both of these pertain to the same individual, King Charibert' (157). Suspicious of these two instances, Jones offers persuasive reasons for thinking the wording 'must have been tampered with'. In general, he uncovers a carefully devised rhetorical strategy. He shows us that by such consistent wording Gregory informed his audience not just of a soul's heavenly status, but also of the kinds of persons and behaviours deserving a celestial reward.

The case of King Charibert also takes us into the chief concern of Chapter 5, the post-mortem fates Gregory assigned to Merovingian royalty and other prominent figures we meet in the *Histories*. The discussion here considers Gregory's depiction of King Clovis (ca. 466–511), perhaps the best-known member of the Merovingian dynasty. As scholarly literature has shown, Clovis is largely a 'legendary' figure, one that Gregory, in his *Histories*, could 'refashion' into the image of 'a king who consistently benefitted from divine support' (208). Of course, the Clovis Gregory constructed still had blemishes. Yet this ruler was 'not subject to Gregory's usual prohibitions against committing fratricide and using deceptive tactics because the foes he vanquished … were either pagans or, even worse, *impii* who relinquished clerical office' (215). Since he converted to Christianity and supported the church while other kings were, in Gregory's words, 'still enveloped by fanatical errors', Clovis's soul went to paradise after he died. The wording is again decisive. In a crucial passage, Clovis 'migrated' (*migravit*). Moreover, when reckoning the years from the death of Martin to that of Clovis, Gregory uses the other crucial word to denote each figure's 'passing', *transitus*. Hence that 'specific vocabulary' reveals what afterlife Gregory believed Clovis deserved.

This profitable attention to phrasing also marks Jones's discussion of 'Merovingians in hell'. Gregory 'stigmatised' over 150 people with 'telltale'

words meant to convey their hopeless fate. 'As he did for other condemned souls, the writer frequently communicated his own valuation of a royal's damnation through words such as *interitus*, *iudicium Dei*, and *ultio divina* …' (230). Significantly, Gregory often puts a person in hell by quoting the opinion of another. In these cases, *interitus* appears as the preferred term, used in direct speech, for designating an individual's hellish hereafter. To make the point, Jones notes that Gregory uses *interitus* 'a record six times' when referring to the evil son of King Chilperic (258 n. 247).

I see three major insights coming from such careful attention to the rhetorical patterns designating the post-mortem existence of the figures Gregory describes. The first echoes an appraisal that has by now won acceptance, but which finds further validation in Jones's study. At play in Gregory's compositions is a consciously chosen rhetorical strategy, one that can be detected even in the *Histories*, hardly the mish-mash of religious gullibility and chaos that certain earlier critics had claimed.[19] The detection of a highly specialised register of words to convey a person's heavenly or infernal status confirms what other ground-breaking publications also show: Gregory composed with a carefully thought-out intention, one we can see at work again, thanks to Jones's painstaking examination. When read alongside other books reacting against the earlier, negative view of Gregory's writings, *Death and the Afterlife* offers a valuable addition that pinpoints precisely the ways in which the Turonian bishop consistently and deliberately used certain rhetorical constructions to inculcate an important message, one that is moral and religious in nature: '[I]t is better to undergo "punishment" in this world in the form of penance than to endure an eternal penalty in the next world' (233). What is more, the narratives describing the demise of some of the more notorious Merovingian villains demonstrate 'how deeply committed the bishop was to maintaining a consistent rationale when assessing the dire consequences that awaited people who failed to heed the warnings of God's saints and holy disciples' (234).

The second insight reaches into Gregory's audience. He expected his readers to pick up on the special vocabulary allocating souls to heaven or hell. Jones captures how Gregory wanted his work received by contemporaries, and that reception entailed the hearing of a pastoral message. For example, when examining the depiction of King Sigibert's assassination, Jones adds another layer to Gregory's reason for composing the *Histories*:

> [It] was not only the numerable *strages gentium* during the civil war of the mid-570s and Sigibert's assignation that compelled Gregory to start composing a history. Rather, it was that and his realization of the

[19] Goffart (2005) 183–97.

> *gloriosissimus rex*'s damnation which prompted him to write a series of books that would serve to convince leading figures of society to repent by parading before the audience a series of instructive memorials of righteous and villainous actors whose souls would be saved and damned in accordance with their deeds, their characters, and potentially their last this-worldly actions (255).

By linking meticulously constructed texts to the hearers of its words, Jones captures not only a sophisticated author, but also a perceptive audience. He brings to light what may be called the 'reader-response' dimension of Gregory's narratives. For this bishop's choice words, planted clues and use of direct discourse point to what he expected of those encountering his stories: that they pick up on and apply to their own lives the moral lesson encapsulated in episodes showing how people earn salvation or damnation. Gregory's writing, then, functions as a pastoral message, a point that *Death and the Afterlife* shows repeatedly. That message underscored the interconnectedness of earthly human actions and their punishment or reward in the next life. Stripped of the details related to specific episodes, the lesson that comes through is this: either imitate holy examples or face the same eternal misery of the reprobates who landed in hell.

As we have seen with Anastasius, this message may come in highly entertaining narratives, though that fact does not change the teaching's importance. Even in a swashbuckler Gregory projects a view of history rooted in the Bible, which records the hand of God at work in past human affairs while also promising that such divine intervention will continue to play out in post-biblical times. In other words, if you ever find yourself on top of a putrefying body in a tomb, do plug your nose and be resourceful but, Gregory would say, do not lose faith. If you remain steadfast in your Christian belief, you will surely be saved, just as Jonah was, for the divine plan revealed in Scripture continues in contemporary life. As for the culprits who put you there, Gregory exposes such evildoers in narratives that also send them to eternal suffering. A hellish end awaits, signalled not just by a special vocabulary, but also the horrible ways in which the wicked die on Gregory's pages. A pestilent, snake-like sore on the groin will finish off that cowardly lowlife who had you stuffed in a tomb with a rotten corpse. The thrust of his stories thus has wide applicability: all scoundrels get the agony they deserve—that, too, is part of the divine plan, to which the Bible and subsequent history attest.

The third insight bears on both religious and literary history. According to Jones, prior to Gregory, Christian authors remained reluctant to state whether specific individuals had been damned. There was, of course, 'group branding' (160). Jews and heretics, for instance, populated hell in anonymous numbers. But 'calling out', to use our parlance, a person as an inhabitant of the infernal regions appears to be a move that early Christian authors were reluctant to

make. In Jones's view, when compared to previous ecclesiastical writers who refrained from naming denizens of hell, Gregory is an innovator since he refined a rhetoric of personal damnation, a rhetoric he applied to specific individuals who, he believed, deserved perdition. In other words, by identifying those condemned to hell, Gregory opened up the possibility of writing about the eternal afterlives of famous people. He is, then, a forerunner of one of the most spectacular literary creations of medieval Europe, *The Divine Comedy*: 'More than seven-hundred years before Dante's famous unabashed effort, Gregory let loose the practice of singling out individual hellmates in Latin writings' (195; see also 58 n. 29).

In general, then, Jones's work offers not just valuable findings, but also an approach that strictly adheres to the Gregorian corpus for the sake of discovering essential features of this bishop's life and thought. Jones makes a compelling case for focusing on Gregory's texts as our surest way of understanding this author's outlook and the messages he wanted to convey through his works. His close attention to, and adroit handling of, these sources throws into relief the main people and events shaping Gregory's outlook, in addition to identifying the rhetorical strategies at work in this bishop's pastoral message.

At the same time, implications arise from Jones's approach, implications that become most apparent in the book's closing remarks. Let us turn, then, to some of the more debatable issues this study raises, not to detract from the book's great merit, but to open up our discussion to some of the larger issues Jones's inquiry touches on, including those surrounding the future of Gregory studies. For the question of what comes next in the field is precisely what Jones addresses at the end, where a stimulating 'Afterword' takes up the work of 'future historians' and the 'cautionary points' they should keep in mind.

The Augustine Question

Did Gregory rely on any of Augustine's works? The matter cannot be adequately addressed here. Certain observations, however, need to be made since the question receives a strong though qualified response from Jones.

To ground our discussion, let us start with a study far from recent, Max Bonnet's *Le latin de Grégoire de Tours*, published in 1890. Given the current gravity of the issue before us, the charming ease with which Bonnet dispatches the problem may make us smile. At the start of this work, still the most extensive treatment of Gregory's language by a single scholar, Bonnet discusses literary influences. After reviewing the authors Gregory knew, Bonnet recognises a problem: even where Gregory explicitly names those writers or quotes from their works, their influence remains difficult to gauge. Their 'style rubbed off' on him 'very faintly'. Of course, we can 'easily recognise' Gregory's literary preferences, 'locutions' from Sulpicius Severus, for example, or *le tour*

poétique that suggests the influence of Prudentius or Fortunatus. Sometimes Gregory also shows *l'admiration naïve* he has for a writer, as with Sidonius. But in the end Bonnet gives the frank impression that the task of establishing Gregory's debt to other authors stymies the textual critic trying to be exact: '… on est assez embarrassé quand il s'agit de déterminer avec plus de précision ce que Grégoire doit à chacun d'eux'.[20]

From even this brief rehearsing of Bonnet's position, readers may already sense that a major figure is missing: Augustine does not appear in the very place we should expect to find him, the early section of Bonnet's study, where Gregory's use of other writers comes under consideration. In fact, aside from some notes on philological or linguistic matters, Augustine will not enter the discussion until Bonnet is more than seven hundred pages into his study. Even there Augustine emerges as a kind of afterthought, deserving just a fleeting remark. Contemporary students coming fresh to Bonnet may be doubly baffled: not only has Augustine been deferred to the study's end; he has also been given no intellectual importance whatsoever, playing a paltry role in this long treatment of Gregory's works. Indeed, the context of Augustine's appearance bears no resemblance to the weighty concerns that vex contemporary scholarship. Instead of encountering complex ideas about the *Heilsgeshichte* that Augustine may have bequeathed to Gregory, we find the illustrious thinker relegated to a brief passage concerning a matter which is, at least in the way Bonnet presents it, utterly trivial: rhyme! What is more, Augustine has been made to share his very little place with Tertullian. Bonnet suggests that the chances of Gregory having known their works seem very small:

> Mais il est plus vraisemblable encore que Grégoire, qui selon toute probabilité n'avait jamais rien lu de saint Augustin, et bien moins encore de Tertullien, dont l'horizon littéraire était fort restreint en général, ne connnaissait l'usage de la rime qu'en poésie, où elle commençait à se faire une place, et qu'il ne songea pas à la transporter dans la prose.[21]

Thanks to the careful work of Pascale Bourgain, we know now that Bonnet could occasionally be 'especially unjust or disinclined to understand'.[22] In a fascinating article, Bourgain ably demonstrates Gregory's use of rhyme, showing that Bonnet's position on this matter needed drastic correction.[23] Still, what would happen if we accepted Bonnet's criterion? Does the fact that Gregory used rhyme, as Bourgain shows, prove he was under Augustine's

[20] Bonnet (1890) 65.

[21] Bonnet (1890) 726.

[22] Bourgain (2016) 174.

[23] Bourgain (2016) 179–85.

sway? Of course not. But Bonnet presents two important features of the problem before us. First, determining the extent of Gregory's debt to other authors remains a challenging task.[24] Second, there is a certain reluctance to make a categorical statement regarding Gregory's reading of Augustine. The reluctance is slight in Bonnet, but it is detectable nonetheless. Although he leaves very little room for it, he does not quite rule out the possibility that Gregory read Augustine. For him the matter is one of probability: 'In all likelihood' Gregory did not know this author's works. Putting aside the mistaken view about rhyme, we may wonder whether what may be called 'the Augustine question' is any closer to finding a definitive answer than it was when Bonnet's work appeared in 1890. To address this matter more directly, let us take a closer look at the positions of Jones and Heinzelmann.

The strands in Jones's handling of the Augustine question require untangling. Although he does not use *Le Latin de Grégoire de Tours* when considering Augustine's place in Gregory's works, Jones does offer a position that sometimes resembles Bonnet's treatment of this matter.[25] For his study gives an impression that Augustinian texts likely left no substantial mark on Gregory, though, and again like Bonnet, he does not completely rule out the possibility that Gregory used the writings of this church father. At the same time, the author of *Death and the Afterlife* does reject the views he attributes to Heinzelmann on the Augustine question. Jones targets and opposes three specific points (294–6): that Gregory 'derived' from Augustine an understanding of the Psalms as 'guarantors' of salvation history's 'fulfilment'; that 'Gregory modeled his famous passage about the *mixte confusequae* condition of the world' on Augustine's description of the heavenly and earthly cities as *invicemque permixtas*; that Gregory's collection of miracle stories about Martin 'somehow owes a debt' to the *City of God*, specifically its last book in which Augustine says that 'he once copied *libelli* featuring present-day miracles'.

When taking up the first point, Augustine's influence on Gregory's interpretation of the Psalms, Jones regards Heinzelmann's view as 'debatable' (294). In a note, he offers a rhetorical question as a counter-argument: 'Simply consider all the individuals, especially family members, whom Gregory witnessed using psalms from his youth. To what extent should we envision these anecdotes as literary fabrications invented to align with a particular theological position?' As we know by now, such rhetoric adheres to Jones's overall argument, which finds clerical relatives playing an enormous role in the formation of Gregory's religious outlook and practices.

As for the second point, the wording and ideas that Heinzelmann sees corresponding to Augustine's *invicem permixtas*, Jones thinks that the passages

[24] Cf. Heinzelmann (2016a) 282.

[25] Jones does mention (at 293 n. 75) Bourgain's article in relation to Bonnet's mistaken view of rhyme, but he does not discuss the latter's stance on the Augustine question.

from the two authors, presented side by side in Heinzelmann's article, is an 'effort' that 'does not convince', with his reason again given in a note (295 n. 84):

> It remains the case that Gregory clearly was not referring to the Church as *mixte confusequae* as Heinzelmann contends, but to historical events, the actions of saints and slaughters of peoples. As Shanzer explains: 'If anything, the prologue to Book 2 [of Gregory's *Histories*] sounds like an implicit defense of why Gregory is not writing pure *hagiography*' … I have argued that it was a succession of traumatic events concentrated in the mid-570s which motivated Gregory to complement his hagiographical habit of glorifying the martyrs and confessors with a moralizing historical rendering of those *mixte confusequae* happenings. Reading Augustine's *De civitate dei* did not spur this effort [emphasis in Shanzer's original].

With respect to the third point, an Augustinian influence on Gregory's recording of miracles at Martin's tomb, Jones thinks such a view 'is simply too much of a stretch'.[26] Instead, he sees other authors who wrote about Martin—Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus of Périgueux, and Venantius Fortunatus—as being far more likely inspirations for Gregory's writing of miracle stories. Of course, to this list, and perhaps more obvious, at least with respect to establishing a practice at Tours, we could add Gregory's episcopal forbearer, Bishop Perpetuus, who had collected, as Gregory would do, miracle stories about the *virtutes* at Martin's tomb. Perpetuus then sent this material to Paulinus of Périgueux, who reworked it for his poem on Martin, which contains our first stories of the saint's post-mortem miracles.

As we have just seen, Jones rejects the three positions that he finds Heinzelmann taking on the issue of Augustine's presence in Gregory's writings. But intriguingly, his rejection also leaves open the possibility that other researchers may still be able to discover an Augustinian mark. Now for the nuances.

In an early note, Jones writes: 'To be clear, I am not entirely dismissing the possibility of Augustinian influences on Gregory' (15 n. 16). As was previously mentioned, Jones does not foreclose the possibility of Gregory having used Augustine. Neither did Bonnet, even if he came very close to doing so. But one important difference between the two also comes to light: at times Jones seems to accept that Gregory did indeed know certain theological

[26] Though it was less of a stretch for another early commentator, Delehaye (1925) 325. Cf. Pietri (1983) 537 n. 63, 544–5 n. 87.

positions of Augustine, though he never explicitly states they had an influence on Gregory. For instance, when discussing ideas about sin, Jones writes:

> By virtue of the sound ecclesiastical education Gregory received, it is highly unlikely he would have been unfamiliar with Augustine's hamartiology, despite him never mentioning the bishop of Hippo in his corpus. But while Augustine stressed Adam and Eve's original sin as the source for polluting all subsequent humanity, Gregory in *Historiae* 1 glossed over the first couple's sin and emphasised instead how Cain's murder of Abel compelled humans into endlessly committing transgressions (115–16).

To put in sharper terms the point that the double negations ('unlikely', 'unfamiliar') dull, the quotation appears to be saying that Gregory almost certainly knew Augustinian hamartiology. Of course, as Jones carefully notes, Gregory also departed from it. Jones makes a similar observation later, when discussing the fate of sinners. On this subject, he detects in Gregory a parallel with, as well as a difference from, Augustine:

> The fastidious Augustine distinguished between Hades, where newly dead wicked souls would experience immediate punishment, and Gehenna, where material eternal fires would torture the condemned, rejoined of body and soul, after Final Judgment. Gregory's imagination for the fates of damned souls ran closely with Augustine's in this respect, but the bishop of Tours's remark that the heretic King Theodoric suffered *gehennae flammantis* immediately instead of *post* Judgment Day reveals that his phraseology about the infernal fires did not conform to the bishop of Hippo's exacting terminology (163).

How should we understand the comment that 'Gregory's imagination ran closely with Augustine's'? Is Jones's assertion another way of saying that Gregory knew Augustine's position on damned souls? I think so, or at least that answer is more plausible than regarding the similarity as a coincidence. As with the first quotation on the subject, we see Jones presenting here a Gregory who seems to be aware of Augustine, but who went his own way nonetheless. There is, in other words, a fine line that Jones holds. Although we can hardly doubt that Gregory's education brought him into contact with Augustine's writings, the Bishop of Tours resisted the Bishop of Hippo when formulating his own hamartiological and eschatological views. While Jones suggests an affinity between the two on condemned souls, he ultimately stresses Gregory's contrasting theological outlook. In addition—and this point will be important when we get to Heinzelmann's words—Jones also finds evidence of a more pronounced refusal of Augustine coming from Gregory: 'The consistent soteriological theology he [Gregory] exhibited was the product of a

studium ad ecclesiastica scripta that retained, probably consciously to some extent, a traditional Gallic interpretation on grace and agency while rejecting an Augustinian one' (141). To say the obvious, 'rejecting' an Augustinian position presupposes knowledge of it.

Such a move gives the impression that Gregory engaged this author. Of course, in the exchanges he had, the Bishop of Tours made sure his unnamed interlocutor would be hard for us to hear, and he refused to give him the final word on the theological issues previously mentioned. But the muffled trace of Augustine remains. Jones has spotted at least one example and, however cautiously, also sees him in the background of Gregory's theological formation. Moreover, future studies may find Augustinian resonances, a 'possibility' Jones is 'not entirely dismissing'. Piecing together what *Death and the Afterlife* offers on the question before us, we find that Gregory was almost certainly exposed to Augustine's thought, that the two ran close to each other in their thinking on at least one occasion, and that they also bumped theological heads. But even though Jones leaves open the possibility that Augustinian undertones may still be found, what he himself notices of Augustine does not seem to amount to much. Fair enough. Yet what is there leaves, perhaps unintentionally, a potent impression in a study that can hardly be characterised as 'Augustine friendly'. For even in this book, Augustine is creeping into Gregory's world. Of course, Jones has no agenda to banish him from Gregory studies, as his qualifying statements show. But what happens to the argument against Heinzelmann now that Augustine is on Gregory's theological horizon?

Before addressing that question, one final point related to the nuances in Jones's position deserves our attention. In the closing remarks, just after his refutation of Heinzelmann on the three positions previously discussed, Jones echoes a point he made at the book's beginning, but this time he offers a fuller explanation. His resistance to Heinzelmann's argument is meant

> not to discourage speculation on Augustinian influences on Gregory, the possibility of which I do not deny, particularly soft influences. I think, however, that the current notion of Gregory the 'Augustinian' ought to be met with the utmost level of scrutiny. I have attempted to convey that Gregory's morally instructive books were more the result of an organically experienced late ancient Gallic Christian society than the product of a study in patristic abstractions (295).

Those remarks give us much to ponder. First, even if Heinzelmann, in Jones's view, fails to show Augustine's influence on Gregory, such a project still deserves the attention of future researchers. Second, and with respect to new studies, Jones appears more open than Bonnet to the possibility of discovering Augustinian traces in Gregory's writings. But he clearly regards the possibility of 'soft influences' as being more likely than, presumably, what we may regard

as stronger ones. Putting aside the issue of what a 'soft' influence might look like, we may wonder whether Jones thinks anyone else besides Heinzelmann has found what may be characterised as a hard influence, the kind of influence that the phrase 'Gregory the "Augustinian"' would capture.

While Jones calls speculation on Gregory's use of Augustine 'nothing new' (15 n. 16), he seems to have Heinzelmann specifically in mind when he enters the debate. As we have seen, much of Jones's refutation occurs in notes, where we find a brief representation of the opposing position. To be sure, Jones has offered a fascinating study, one in which the primary aim is to show the role that family and 'Death' played in the making of Gregory. What may be regarded as the secondary aim, correcting an Augustinian view of Gregory, comes out of the primary goal, so that we do not get a full unpacking of what Jones's opposition maintains. Without at all wishing to detract from the book's significant accomplishments, I wondered if the other side of the debate had more to it than what Jones presented. Like other lively, deeply learned, and innovative studies on Gregory, *Death and the Afterlife* instils a curiosity about the views critiqued.

In the presentation of the study that he mainly engages, Jones sees Heinzelmann pressing an Augustinian reading of Gregorian texts in the three areas already mentioned. Yes, Heinzelmann's article does try to establish links to Augustine, as Jones makes clear. But this piece also reveals something else: it shows where Gregory departed from an Augustinian position. In fact, a distinguishing qualification arises when Heinzelmann considers a parallel he detects between Augustine and Gregory. As we are about to see, in addition to finding similarities between the two authors, Heinzelmann also highlights a pronounced difference:

> *Unlike* an Augustine speaking of the two cities, earthly and heavenly, Gregory does not speak of the 'mixed' Church in the same way as about the immaculate Church, although he recognized that the history of the world before the Final Judgment consists of the structural opposition between the good and the *miseri*, the unfortunate or wretched. For him, there are only those who are in the immaculate Church and the others, who are not. This scheme may have seemed more understandable to his public than the existence of two structures, two societies or cities, that in reality are only one before and after the Last Judgment [emphasis added].[27]

Those words hardly propose Gregory's wholehearted adoption of Augustine. Instead, we find the Augustinian idea of two cities significantly reconfigured

[27] Heinzelmann (2016a) 296.

for the sake of presenting a scheme more accessible to Gregory's time. But let us assume Jones is correct in thinking that Heinzelmann's position falters. Even if that critique is sound, should we characterise the passage above as an example of an argument for a 'dominant' Augustinian influence? Can such a characterisation hold if the quoted words present the Augustinian master-trope of two cities undergoing fundamental alterations to suit a Merovingian audience?

What is at stake, though not directly stated in the quoted passage, is the meaning of that crucial phrase, *mixte confusequae*, in which Heinzelmann sees an echo of Augustine's *invicem permixtas*. Both the remarks introducing the debated passage and the passage itself, from the *Histories*, are now presented as they are found in the article:

> Gregory's idea of a Church that we call 'mixed' by virtue of his one phrase *mixte confusaeque*,[28] which is illustrated in Book 1 [of Gregory's Histories] by evidence of biblical examples, is finally laid out in a programmatic fashion in the prologues to Books 2 and 3.
> The prologue of Book 2 begins: 'Following the chronological course of time, I recount in their entangled and mixed-together fashion [*mixte confusequae*] the miracles of saints as well as the massacres of peoples. For I think it should not be considered unreasonable to recount the happy life of the saints in the midst of the calamities of the wretched'.[29]

Immediately after quoting the passage from Gregory, Heinzelmann notes '[t]he dichotomy expressed in the two clauses symbolising the opposition of Christ's immaculate Church to the representatives of the "mixed" Church'. As readers will recall, Jones sees no reason for thinking that Gregory is referring here to the church as *mixte confusequae*. Instead, he finds the phrasing applicable more generally to 'historical events, the actions of saints and the slaughters of peoples'.

There is good reason to accept Jones's position. Finding a modified version of Augustine's 'two cities' in the prologue is indeed an interpretation that should be 'met with the utmost level of scrutiny', as Jones advises. Of course, the idea of 'two cities', earthy and heavenly, and that of a church being 'mixed' and 'immaculate' may bear conceptual congruency, but that is a possibility Jones does not consider since he has a more fundamental critique at work. In

[28] Regarding *confusaeque* and *confusequae*: in an earlier work, Heinzelmann (1994) 214 n. 23/103 n. 23, prefers the former 'as the more correct form', with the latter represented in just one manuscript. But *confusequae* is the reading Krusch gives for his edition, which is followed here except for the quotation above.

[29] Heinzelmann (2016a) 297, translating Gregory, *Histories* 2.prol., with my own insertion of the Latin phrase.

his view the phrase *mixte confusequae* neither refers to the church nor echoes Augustine. Hence the possibility of a conceptual resemblance is hardly worth considering. In short, for Jones there is nothing in Heinzelmann's argument about the prologue that supports seeing it even as a 'soft' Augustinian influence. Instead, Jones's interpretation captures an obvious feature of the passage: Gregory is indeed referring to historical occurrences.

But Gregory's understanding of his role as a narrator and as a follower of models also comes to light. For if we continue reading the rest of the passage, we sense Gregory's attentiveness to precedence and genre. After giving biblical examples of opposing figures—e.g., 'just Samuel' and 'sacrilegious Phineas', 'David the Stronghand' and the 'foreigner Goliath'—he turns to ecclesiastical authors: 'So too did Eusebius, Severus, and Jerome in their chronicles, and Orosius also, weave together the wars of kings and the virtues of martyrs. I have also written in this way, so that the order of the centuries and the reckoning of years may be found complete up to our times'. Again, there is no explicit association of bellicose rulers with a 'mixed church' or of holy people with an 'immaculate' one, the modification Heinzelmann sees Gregory making of Augustine's two cities. Yet we do see in this prologue 'the structural opposition between the good and the *miseri*', as Heinzelmann notes. What is more, although Heinzelmann's interpretation does not convince Jones, other elements in the passage suggest that a vision of the church appears even if the phrase *mixte confusequae* is not referring to it. After all, to what institution do those 'happy' saints and martyrs belong? That they are representatives of the church, of course, does not prove an Augustinian influence. But can we so easily rule it out, especially after what Jones himself has stated? Recall his words: 'it is highly unlikely' that Gregory, given his ecclesiastical education, 'would have been unfamiliar with Augustine's hamartiology'. Might we also assert, then, that it is highly unlikely he was unfamiliar with the *City of God*? And if on at least one issue 'Gregory's imagination … ran closely with Augustine's', how can the possibility of the latter's influence on another be so confidently dismissed? While Jones is justified in wanting better evidence than the phrase *mixte confusequae* affords, what should we make out of the prologue's oppositional pairings? Should they, too, be regarded as owing no debt to Augustine, but instead be seen as an influence coming solely from the biblical texts and authors Gregory acknowledges?[30]

[30] Consider Breukelaar (1994) 181: '… although Gregory does not give evidence of having known St. Augustine, he accepted some of his ideas, whereas, although he did know Orosius' *Historia adversus paganos*, he gives no evidence whatsoever of having been influenced by any of its central ideas'. Also intriguing is the position of Rohr (2022) 134: 'With an almost Augustinian dualism, he [Gregory] depicts history as a constant sequence of opposition between good and evil'. Similarly, Palmer (2014) 56: 'Each [i.e., Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours] in their own way took Augustine's ideas and used them as part of a rhetoric agitating for change in a world unsettled'. Perhaps what deserves our attention is

Certainty here is elusive. As Giselle de Nie observes: 'Since Gregory nowhere mentions the Church Father [Augustine], one cannot prove direct knowledge, but one cannot disprove it'.[31] This interpretive difficulty deserves to be kept in mind when the Augustine question arises in Gregory studies. Its validity suggests to me that the issue before us will not find a tidy resolution.[32]

In fact, the position Jones opposes looks less clear-cut to me than *Death and the Afterlife* makes out. For there are other instances in which Heinzelmann notes Gregory's modification of, or even resistance to, Augustine. For example, shortly after noting that Gregory is 'arguing in the same manner as Augustine about the resurrection', the article considers the former's understanding of Sunday as the day of resurrection. On this point, 'Gregory shows himself *explicitly opposed* to his predecessor [Augustine] …' (emphasis added).[33] Similarly, 'Gregory *does not accept*' the six ages of the world that Augustine proposed (emphasis added).[34] Especially telling is Gregory's position on Augustine's treatment of the 'reign of Christ and his saints for one thousand years'. According to Heinzelmann, 'Gregory, *hostile* to any precision about the length of time preceding the coming of the Antichrist, does not make use of this concept' (emphasis added).[35] And like Jones's Gregory, Heinzelmann's can also buck a trend: 'In the exegesis of Ps. 50:12–14 in the prologue to Book 3 of the *Histories*, Gregory *even goes counter* to a part of exegetical tradition …' (emphasis added).[36] The subject of miracles also offers another example in which Augustine's alleged influence undergoes a Gregorian modification. As he does in the very first passage we quoted from this article, Heinzelmann gives us a Gregory who occasionally resembles the image Jones offers, a Gregory who knows but does not name Augustine, a Gregory who goes his own way: 'In his attitude toward the miraculous, Gregory, while approaching Augustinian positions, essentially depends on a belief (*dogma*) that brings the miracle directly back to the gifts of the Lord Himself …'[37]

not so much that their claims are hard to prove, but that these researchers have independently formed a similar impression—Gregory was familiar with Augustinian ideas.

[31] de Nie (2003) XVII.4.

[32] Note the view offered by Hailstone (2020) 76, whose position may not be so different from Jones's, though it is expressed with less ambiguity: 'Yet, even if Gregory did not directly know Augustine's treatises, the influence which the Bishop of Hippo exerted on those writers who did determine Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy in fifth- and sixth-century Gaul renders an indirect influence highly probable'.

[33] Heinzelmann (2016a) 292.

[34] Heinzelmann (2016a) 292 n. 32.

[35] Heinzelmann (2016a) 315.

[36] Heinzelmann (2016a) 295.

[37] Heinzelmann (2016a) 322.

A Gregory 'approaching Augustinian positions' on miracles resembles a Gregory whose 'imagination', as Jones writes, 'ran closely with Augustine's' on sin. The views harmonise in two respects: both scholars sense Gregory's knowledge of Augustine and both also find him resistant to Augustine. Put simply, Jones and Heinzelmann each present a Gregory who knows an Augustinian position and yet does not always follow it. Of course, there is a major difference: Heinzelmann does find Augustine exercising an influence on Gregory. As we have seen, Jones finds no validity to Heinzelmann's argument. Even so, let us not forget what we have established. Jones believes there is no good reason to doubt that Gregory had knowledge of Augustine. He accepts the possibility that new studies may find 'soft' influences. At one point he even sees a congruity between the two authors. Should the instance of Gregory's imagination running closely with Augustine's be understood as an example of the latter's influence? How else can it be viewed? At the same time, determining what Gregory owes to another author is still, to recall Bonnet, 'difficult to determine with precision' even when an influence is thought to have been found. For as we have seen, where Heinzelmann detects Augustinianism, he also shows that on some issues Gregory re-worked or rejected it.

Such re-working strikes me as being relevant to what Jones sees Gregory doing with the story of Cain and Abel. That story offers the typological framework better suited to Gregory's circumstances than Augustine's understanding of Adam and Eve. Yet, although the biblical examples they use do not match, both Gregory and Augustine still see an offense at the beginning of human history as a fundamental transgression, whose ripples reach into later eras, when the initial wrong plays out in contemporary re-enactments. Of course, Jones highlights the variance here, showing that the two authors have focused on different Scriptural passages. But have the different accounts not been put to the same use? Is there not congruity between the way the two authors use a momentous biblical event as a model for understanding the flawed human condition? Of course, if there is such congruity, that itself hardly constitutes demonstrable evidence for Augustine's influence. But can we also easily discount the congruity? To recall de Nie's insight, how can we 'disprove' that Gregory has borrowed an Augustinian idea and re-formulated it for his own times?

Now that we have seen comments in the article showing that Gregory re-worked or departed from Augustinian positions, we may ask once more whether the phrase 'Gregory the "Augustinian"' accurately captures what Heinzelmann presents. Can Augustine be a 'dominant influence' even though, as the article indicates, Gregory substantially modifies or, on occasion, even rejects his thought? While answers will not be offered here—readers will have to examine the studies and decide for themselves—the material presented in this section suggests that even if Jones is justified in thinking that the argument

for Augustine's influence remains unconvincing, there is more complexity to Heinzelmann's views than the impression we have of them from *Death and the Afterlife*.

At this point, we may also appreciate why consensus on the Augustine question is hard to achieve. The debated phrase found in the prologue to Book 2 shows that part of the difficulty lies with Gregory, with the interpretive challenges his rhetoric poses. When discussing this prologue in an earlier work, Heinzelmann wrote, 'The expression [i.e., *mixte confusequae*] has provoked much confusion among commentators on Gregory, especially in terms of the misleading English translation, 'mixed and muddled …'[38] Perhaps another reason for the difficulty comes from not being attentive enough to the humbling epistemological aporia that de Nie captures. The work of both Heinzelmann and Jones gives an impression of having dispelled confusion about Gregory's prologue. Both eminent historians are certain that their positions on the passage and the phrase in question are correct. But other researchers surveying the text's scholarly reception may be more bewildered than confident. If this source is so readily explainable, if the meaning of that phrase is so obvious, why do some of the most penetrating commentators, who do not rely on an English translation, have such different and sometimes opposing interpretations?

There remains the question of categorising an influence. Consider how Adriann H. B. Breukelaar sizes up Gregory's counting of the generations preceding Christ's birth. After refuting a scholarly explanation that sees biblical passages and Jerome as the main sources for Gregory's reckoning, Breukelaar gives compelling reasons for proposing another influence: 'Given this evidence [against the scholarly consensus], Gregory must have known a tradition which presented to him a division of the generations from Adam to Abraham into groups of ten. *Such a tradition is known through St. Augustine*' (emphasis added).[39] Perhaps Jones would characterise this instance as a 'soft' influence. Yet what Breukelaar has discovered—it amounts to an Augustinian way of understanding periodisation—seems something more than 'soft'. As Bonnet said, we may sometimes find ourselves 'embarrassed' when trying to make 'a more precise determination'.

This issue of a shared tradition also relates to more general considerations regarding Christian culture. Some religious figures of sixth-century Gaul liked to show that Augustine, along with other early Christian authors, had a firm place in their world. In a poem by Gregory's friend, Venantius Fortunatus, Saint Radegund of Poitiers 'feeds on' (*alitur*) early Christian writers, including Augustine (*Carm.* 8.1). Jones even refers to the 'Augustinianism' marking

[38] Heinzelmann (1994) 214 n. 23/103 n. 23. I have very slightly altered the translation.

[39] Breukelaar (1994) 179.

Radegund's two *vitae*, the first of which Fortunatus himself wrote (203 n. 13). In another poem (*Carm.* 5.3), Gregory himself holds a place alongside famous Christian authors, including Augustine.

As Jones himself implies when commentating on Gregory's education and hamartiology, Augustine is part of Gregory's world.[40] While Jones seems to be subtly accepting that Augustine did have a place there, he does so with what may be called a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Perhaps more telling is his leaving open the viability of exploring the Augustine question in future studies. At the same time, his discussion also suggests that Augustine had a very small role to play in Gregory's theology and writings. He may be right. Certainly, the absence of Augustine's name and the lack of obvious literary borrowings—as was previously stated, Jones does not accept the textual evidence Heinzelmann finds—lend support to a position that rejects arguments for Augustine's presence in Gregory's texts. What is more, Jones's turn to autobiographical features compellingly shows strong, personal forces at work in Gregory's formation. Still, a certain precariousness, perhaps unavoidable, marks his stance against Heinzelmann. For once Augustine makes an appearance in Gregory's world—and we cannot get around the fact that he is there—does the task of disproving his impact not become more difficult, as de Nie's astute observation reveals? Put differently, if one must concede that Gregory knew Augustinian positions, that his education brought him into contact with them, that Gallic theologians wrangled with them, and that Gregory's closest contemporaries also encountered Augustine's writings, then an ironclad refutation of the scholarship claiming to have found such influences becomes harder to pull off. In short, if it is 'highly unlikely' that Gregory 'would have been unfamiliar with Augustine', how can we ever be fully convinced that Heinzelmann is entirely mistaken?

To summarise, it hardly seems far-fetched to believe the opposite of what Bonnet thought: 'In all likelihood', Gregory did read Augustine or at least know Augustinian positions. Jones and Heinzelmann differ over where and to what extent Augustine's influence on Gregory may be detectable, but at times they also coincide when showing the Bishop of Tours departing from his theological predecessor.

Death, Historiography, and Approaches

As was previously noted, Jones thinks Gregory's turn to historiography was the result of the new bishop's confrontation with 'Death' (103), specifically the warfare in the Touraine just after he assumed the episcopacy in 573. The causal connection Jones makes between mortality and historiography is

[40] Cf. Brown (2012) 482.

unmistakable. 'Death compelled' Gregory to take up a new genre. On this issue, Jones follows Guy Halsall, who gives a starting point for the massive work that would become the *Histories*.[41] The prologue to Book 5 assumes great importance, for there Gregory, according to Halsall and Jones, denounces the royal combatants whose civil wars were destroying the region. There is, however, one major obstacle Jones must overcome to make his argument work: a masterful article by Alexander Murray.[42] This work demonstrates that there is no way to know for sure whether Gregory has any specific kings in mind in this prologue, which names no contemporary royal figures. In fact, Jones acknowledges that Murray's 'strident voice', is 'undeniably correct' in 'opposing theories' that see 'Gregory employing diachronic composition, or writing … historical books by and large in chronological order'. After praising Murray for being 'one scholar who has managed to keep his own advice and has resisted the Siren's Song of speculating on watershed moments impacting the *Historiae*'s composition', Jones boldly declares himself 'no Odysseus'! (105) He will engage in the kind of thinking Murray has discouraged, and he proceeds to offer his reasons for seeing the destruction of the mid-570s as a catastrophe that launched Gregory into historiography. But, as Jones acknowledges, Murray found compelling reasons for thinking that the *Histories* could not have been started until 585. Jones therefore has a difficult task. On the one hand, he concedes the validity of Murray's carefully formulated argument; on the other he tries to find in that very argument room for positing an earlier date for Gregory's foray into the genre of history.

As one who has never been tempted to enter this debate, I leave the disputes over dating to those with more expertise in the matter. There is a feature in Jones's argument, however, that relates to the question of future Gregory studies. Is there a special connection between death and the writing of history? From the way Jones links the two, there is. In more general and theoretical terms, a prominent thinker on the nature of historiography also makes such a connection. For Michel de Certeau, *l'écriture de la histoire* entails an encounter with death and even functions as a form of 'mourning'(*le deuil*).[43] In fact, the prologue to Book 5, a text on which so much depends, not only laments the loss of life but also, in keeping with Certeau's understanding of the genre, 'allocates to the present the privilege of recapitulating the past' as a form of 'knowledge'.[44] For as this prologue indicates, the great royal ancestors, especially Clovis, behaved better. They would not dare conduct such wars as those that are occurring in Gregory's time. Thus, Certeau's insight aligns with

[41] Halsall (2007) 297–313.

[42] Murray (2008).

[43] Certeau, (1982) 21.

[44] Certeau (1975) 18–19.

Jones's contention. For the prologue is a *travail de la mort et travail contre la mort*—a 'labour of death' in the sense that death led to its production or, to use Jones's word, 'compelled' it; a 'labour against death' in the sense that Gregory clearly uses historical writing not only to denounce needless carnage, but also to make a record that survives him, a record that gives us a way of knowing, however imperfectly, the past represented in his text.[45]

To use Certeau as a way of thinking about the link Jones sees between death and the writing of history raises more general questions regarding approaches. What interpretive tools should we use? Does theory have a place in Gregory studies? Jones gives us an idea of what approaches to take and his musings on the subject are consistent with his study's overall thrust: 'The field may benefit enormously from the efforts of historically-minded researchers versed in, or willing to study and become attuned to, theology, poetry, linguistics, and … classical historiography' (292). Given the reference to 'historically-minded researchers', the fields he names presumably represent areas directly related to Gregory's world or sources close to it. The methodological consistency also becomes apparent on the very last pages of *Death and the Afterlife*. There Jones adds to his previous recommendation by naming the specific authors whose works may shed light on Gregory's writings. As we might expect, when he gives us his final words about the next stage of research, the places he urges us to go are completely in Gregory's world:

> The majority of Gregory's influences lie before our eyes in the bishop's pages—pious members of Gallic society with whom he lived and vestiges of lines from authors whom he read, many named in the text. Accordingly, what seems in order are deeper dives into the influences of Cassian, Faustus of Riez, Prudentius, Paulinus of Périgeux, Sulpicius Severus, Sidonius Appolinaris, Avitus of Vienne, Caesarius of Arles, and Venantius Fortunatus to better comprehend the world in which this preacher [i.e., Gregory] thrived alongside the individuals whose souls he aspired to save (296).

Of course, the legitimate concern historians have over anachronistic interpretations may be one obvious obstacle to 'theorising' Gregory. But perhaps another approach may appear more grounded, especially for those interested in pursuing themes related to Jones's work. For the experience of death represented 'in the pages' of Gregory raises another, though more specific, methodological question: should we add anthropology to Jones's list? Anthropologists, after all, have been making major contributions to death studies as well as the closely related field of ritual. Outside of those areas the need for anthropologically engaged research has also been expressed. Van

[45] Certeau (1975) 19.

Dam, who notes a certain resistance among some scholars to use 'up-to-date methodologies', advocates for the application of anthropology and other 'comparative studies' in his own commentary exploring the meaning of illness, sickness and healing in Gregory's miracle stories.[46]

More far-reaching in its use of comparative studies is the work of de Nie, whose investigations, while focused closely on the Latin sources, have thoroughly incorporated a range of scholarly literatures, including psychological research, to explicate Gregory's texts. Whether de Nie's broad knowledge of intellectual history, along with her impressive application of ideas outside the field, will find followers remains an open question. At this time, however, it appears that researchers are doing precisely what Jones advocates, sticking to Gregory's pages. In fact, even though Jones graciously acknowledges his considerable debt to Heinzelmann (15–16), we may not get a strong impression from *Death and the Afterlife* that the work of the latter is steeped in Gregorian sources.

Conclusion: Surviving Intact

Let us recall an observation from the book's Introduction: 'To continue advancing towards a more accurate understanding of late ancient Gallic society as a whole, it is necessary to get Gregory right' (15). That statement is incontestable. It also begs a question: have we not been getting Gregory right? If we consider the major scholars responsible for the critical shifts leading to Gregory's positive reassessment, then we may say that they have surely been getting Gregory right, or at least mostly right. Jones, too, I sense, acknowledges that achievement when he comments on the 'near consensus' that has emerged. Yet even if we put aside the debate on Augustine or the problems over dating the *Histories*, we still find pronounced interpretive differences marking the most accomplished and best-known studies that offer an overarching explanation of what Gregory was up to. Put differently, despite agreement over certain points, the variation between the major thinkers treating Gregory remains a striking feature of their work, as Jones recognises (14 n. 12).[47] Can such contrasting views of Gregory all be largely correct? They can if we accept another crucial insight that de Nie offers: 'Tantalizing glimpses in the writings of bishop Gregory of Tours … reveal such a many-

[46] Van Dam (1993) 7, 84–6. Similarly, Flint (1991) 12.

[47] Palmer (2014) 68: 'Yet Gregory and the scholarship about him pose some intriguing challenges, not least because there is rarely ever agreement about what Gregory's intentions were …'

sided personality and author that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that each Gregory scholar tends to have his "own" Gregory'.[48]

There are indeed many sides to Gregory. His different literary productions show this. At the same time, he also gives the impression that he envisaged his work as having an overall coherence.[49] The concluding words to his *Histories*, with their emphasis on literary integrity, assume as much:

> I have written ten books of histories, seven books of miracles, one on the life of the Fathers. I have made one book of commentary on the Psalms. I have also composed one book on ecclesiastical offices. Although I have written in a rather coarse style, nevertheless I conjure all you priests of the Lord, who will take charge of the Turonian church after lowly me, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the judgement day, dreadful to all who stand accused, that if you are not to be condemned with the devil and confused when departing from that judgement, you never cause these books to be destroyed or rewritten, selecting some things and overlooking others, but let everything with you remain intact and unharmed (*integra inlibataque*), just as I have left them (*Histories* 10.18).

He follows those comments with the acknowledgement that the learned will give his writings an unfavourable reception. Then he again insists that such an expert not 'tear apart' (*avellas*) his compositions.[50] Though these closing remarks do not figure in Jones's book, his study sensitises us to how deeply Gregory's writing is entangled with death and the various ways it textures the bishop's understanding of survival strategies. For instance, Gregory's emphatic request to keep his writings whole uses a term that takes us back to where we started, saints and tombs. The same word that shows up in descriptions of perfectly preserved holy corpses discovered in sarcophagi appears in Gregory's instructions regarding the preservation of his work: *integra*.[51] Like the pristine and incorruptible *corpus* of the holy dead, the literary corpus of Gregory must also stay 'intact'. Moreover, almost the exact same phrasing Gregory uses for expressing his wish to keep his works preserved also appears in the disputed prologue to Book 5, where he reminds his audience that Clovis had left his descendants a kingdom that was 'whole and unharmed' (*integrum inlesumque*). Whether the concern is his literary works, the bodies of saints or politics, Gregory clearly valued *integritas*. Its opposite is the troubling experience of

[48] de Nie (2003) XVII.1.

[49] Cf. Goffart (2005) 152, 183, 197.

[50] His only exception is allowing his works to be turned into poetry, but only on condition that the literary corpus be 'kept safe' (*salvo opere nostro*).

[51] *GC* 100; similarly, *GC* 33; *Vitae patrum* 7.4

Anastasius. Except for saintly relics, death is a matter of fragmentation, of losing wholeness and identity.

Jones's study thus opens up further investigative directions to take when considering the role of *Mors* in Gregory's writings. Intriguingly, Gregory's awareness of his own death, an awareness we can see in his concern over what will happen to his works 'after' him (*post me*), entails an implicit claim for his future life. This afterlife is not the sort of immortality we immediately think of, given Gregory's belief in a judgment day, heaven and hell. That aspect is there, of course, in his closing words of eschatological warning. But one feature of the immortality he seems to be after centres on his texts, that 'delicate web' he spun.[52] What comes into view is his stake in a future life on earth. Gregory seeks to last through his writings. He also wants those writings to exist in a particular way, as intact as a holy corpse. Such a body, Jones reminds us, is a 'sign of eternal life' (71). Similarly, a literary body of work, kept whole, will be the surest sign that death does not get the last word. Clearly, Gregory hoped to survive in this world as well as in the next. His works are the 'speaking relics' of himself; his desire to keep them whole, words against his own death. And they have survived—that is to say, Gregory has survived.

As has been noted, the insistence on literary integrity suggests that Gregory had a unified vision of his works. So what is the meaning that makes all the different compositions cohere? To take de Nie's last insight, one wants to respond by saying that the answer depends on which Gregory scholar we read![53] But in light of Gregory's closing remarks, we sense that he has involved himself and us in carrying out what may be the most far-reaching and positive aspect of his writing. His desire to stay 'intact' expresses the hope that life will continue after him and that his own writings, in their fullness, will enrich it. Put differently, there is something profound at work in our attempts 'to get Gregory right'. As Jones's astute examination of Gregory's rhetoric reminds us, this bishop hoped for a certain reception of his works, a 'reader-response' conditioned by his careful phrasing and pastoral goals. Similarly, his request at the end of the *Histories* implicates us in his own survival. We are doing exactly what Gregory wanted us to do, keep him alive. As we strive to get him right and understand the whole of his writings, he enlists us in the project of maintaining his own literary life after his physical death.

Gregory has been called a 'maddening figure' and a 'slippery writer'.[54] Earlier we saw Heinzelmann's comment about the wide-spread confusion over just one phrase. And speaking of the *Histories* in general, de Nie says: 'It is this

[52] Goffart (2005) 197.

[53] Cf. Goffart (2005) 121.

[54] Shanzer (2002) 248; Palmer (2014) 74.

jumbled mosaic that has puzzled and exasperated historians'.[55] Of course, as his request indicates, Gregory sensed that his writings would put off readers, especially highly educated ones. Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to think he had more in mind than simply a *stilus rusticior* as one of his unattractive features. At least with respect to their modern reception, the 'maddening' and 'slippery' features of his literary corpus, the elements that have 'puzzled' us, go beyond Gregory's Latinity. Given what the scholarship has discovered, and continues to discover, I find myself unable to resist mentioning an obvious parallel from modernity.

In his biography on James Joyce, Richard Ellmann recounts what the Irish novelist is reported to have remarked about his *Ulysses*: 'I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality'.[56] What Joyce said of his own work may also apply to the texts of Gregory. The 'puzzles' he left us keep this sixth-century author alive. Of course, in Joyce's case, the 'puzzles' are deliberate. May we say the same about those in Gregory's works? As has already been stated, Jones's study confirms that by means of a close focus on Gregory's words—by being attentive to their sophisticated ways of encoding theological and social messages—we can indeed recover the author's intentions from his writings. We have reason, therefore, to believe that the difficulties Gregory presents to readers, especially in the *Histories*, are deliberate.

Even if we keep getting Gregory right, I find myself unable to imagine his writings ever being so well understood that we can bring the study of him to a close. Like one of those bulky tombs, Gregory lasts. The possibility of exhausting the meaning of his texts seems foreclosed precisely for the reason Joyce gave when discussing *Ulysses*. There is simply too much there that eludes us, too much that we still need to make sense of. Indeed, the 'academic industry' devoted to Gregory continues to thrive.[57] New editions of his works are being brought out.[58] And even after Jones's recent book, another fascinating monograph on Gregory has appeared from the same publisher.[59]

Perhaps, then, there is no exaggeration in saying that there has never been a better time to study Gregory. We keep finding more to say—and more to

[55] de Nie (1987) 9.

[56] Ellman (1982) 521.

[57] Wood (2002) 29.

[58] Pietri (2020) has published a new edition of *GM* and *Liber vitae patrum* (2016), each with a facing French translation.

[59] Rotman (2022). While *Death and the Afterlife* may still be considered a recent publication, this review comes too long after its appearance. I extend my deepest apologies for my delay to the author, Professor Jones, to Amsterdam University Press, and to the patient review editor of *Histos*, Adam Kemezis.

dispute. Even with all this hermeneutical activity Gregory's writings do not, so to speak, 'bottom out'. He has indeed kept his commentators occupied 'for centuries'. *Death and the Afterlife*, with the intriguing ideas and debates it offers, is yet another indication of Gregory's power to engage us. We 'keep busy', and Gregory, who made an exquisite literature out of death, keeps himself alive.

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