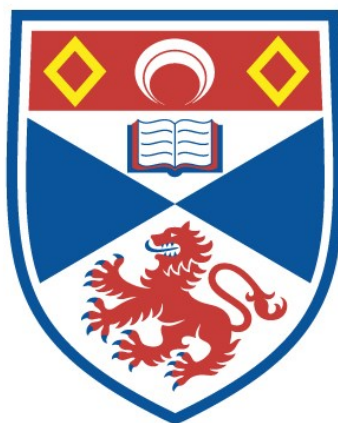


GENDER AND VIOLENCE IN GREGORY OF TOURS'
DECEM LIBRI HISTORiarUM

Jennifer McRobbie

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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Gender and Violence in Gregory of Tours'
Decem Libri Historiarum

Jennifer McRobbie



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

Date of Submission

19th August 2011

Declaration

I, Jennifer McRobbie, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 76,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in August 2011; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 2004 and 2011.

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Abstract

The *Decem Libri Historiarum* of Gregory of Tours, our only coherent narrative source for the latter half of the sixth century in Gaul, has been the subject of much lively scholarly debate as to its reliability and original purpose. Literary approaches have proved useful; however, the findings of gender studies, applied so fruitfully in many other areas of historical research, have thus far had virtually no impact on the study of Gregory's work.

For the first time, this thesis examines the role of gender in the *DLH*. Just as gender assumptions were vital to the thought world of the writers of the books of the Old Testament, so too they were vital to Gregory, who took these books as his main inspiration. It will be shown that gender can offer a fresh and vital perspective on some of the most contentious issues associated with the *DLH*, taking us closer than ever to a full appreciation of Gregory's objectives.

In exposing Gregory's literary devices and strategies, this study goes beyond Gregory's viewpoint, with implications for the study of kingship, and particularly queenship, in the sixth century. It will be shown that competing norms of elite masculine and feminine behaviour were in flux over the period, and required careful negotiation.

This study also has repercussions for gender studies more widely. In demonstrating the usefulness of gender approaches in analysing a text to which such approaches have never before been applied, the thesis indicates that gender must be considered an essential analytical tool in historical research.

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Acknowledgments

Seven years is a long time to spend with any one project, and unsurprisingly I have managed to incur a fair few debts of gratitude over that time. I would like to thank staff and fellow students at the Mediaeval History dept. at St. Andrews University, and in particular, attendees of the Postgraduate seminar series, at which I was able to present several early versions of chapters, and to receive valuable feedback on these. These early years were facilitated by a Doctoral Award from the AHRC.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Julia Smith, for her encouragement, inspiration and what must have seemed at times endless patience.

Many thanks to my parents, Janet and Andrew McRobbie, for their support, and determination to see me to completion even when it felt that my own belief in the possibility was beginning to fade. To my parents and also my parents-in-law Jenna Agate and Trevor Timms I would like to extend my thanks for babysitting services!

To my husband, Ben Agate, thanks are not really enough. But thank you anyway.

Finally, thanks to my two boys, Lewis and Joseph Agate, who arrived in the middle of it all, and who helped me keep half an eye on real life when I was in danger of losing myself somewhere in the late sixth century. It is to you two, and to your Daddy, that this thesis is dedicated.

Abbreviations

Gregory's works

<i>DLH</i>	<i>Decem Libri Historiarum</i>
<i>GC</i>	<i>Liber in Gloria confessorum</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>Liber in Gloria martyrum</i>
<i>VJ</i>	<i>Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris</i>
<i>VM</i>	<i>Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi</i>

<i>AHR</i>	<i>The American Historical Review</i>
<i>Annales, HSS</i>	<i>Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>Comitatus</i>	<i>Comitatus: a Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>The English Historical Review</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>GEMW</i>	L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith eds., <i>Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West 300-900</i> (Cambridge, 2004)
<i>HWJ</i>	<i>History Workshop Journal</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JMEMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern History</i>
<i>JMEMS</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>LHF</i>	<i>Liber Historiae Francorum</i>
<i>LHR</i>	<i>Law and History Review</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Medievalia et Humanistica</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>AA</i>	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
<i>Epp</i>	<i>Epistolae</i>
<i>SSRM</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scriptores</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>RBPH</i>	<i>Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire</i>
<i>Signs</i>	<i>Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society</i>
<i>WGT</i>	K. Mitchell and I. Wood eds., <i>The World of Gregory of Tours</i> (Brill, 2002).

Gender and Violence in Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*

Introduction

The would-be historian of sixth-century Gaul has little choice, and perhaps still less desire, but to begin with the works of Gregory of Tours. A native of Clermont, Gregory became bishop of the politically and spiritually vital see of Tours in 573, and appears to have written copiously throughout his twenty-one years in office. The most famous of his works is the *Decem Libri Historiarum*¹ (henceforth *DLH*), which cuts, on a first reading, an appealingly chaotic path through history from Creation through the Old and New Testaments, followed by a few choice highlights from Roman history and that of a few other countries – lest the reader fall under the misapprehension that Gregory is ignorant of such places – before coming to focus, somewhat abruptly, on Gaul, and on the see of Tours in particular. In addition to this most famous of his works, he also composed eight books of *Miracula*,² as well as a treatise on the Offices of the Church called “On the Course of the Stars,”³ a piece on the “Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”⁴ and a commentary on

¹ Ed. B. Krusch, in B. Krusch and W. Levison eds. *MGH SSRM* I.1 (Hanover, 1937), ed. and trans. O. M. Dalton, *The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours* (Oxford, 1927), vol. 2; ed. and trans. L. Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks* (London, 1974); ed. and trans. A. C. Murray, *Gregory of Tours: the Merovingians* (Peterborough, Ontario, 2006).

² These were comprised of: *Liber in Gloria martyrum* (*GM*), ed. B. Krusch, in B. Krusch ed., *MGH SSRM* I.2 (Hanover, 1885) 484-561, trans. R. Van Dam, *Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs* (Liverpool, 1988); *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 562-584, trans. R. Van Dam, “The Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St. Julian” in Van Dam ed. *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993) 162-195; *Liber de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, (*VM* - four books) ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 584-661, trans. Van Dam, “The Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin” in Van Dam ed. *Saints and their Miracles* 199-303 and trans. W. C. McDermott in Peters ed. *Monks, Bishops and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500-700* (Philadelphia, 1975) 133-134, 147-178; *Liber vitae patrum*, (*VP*) ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 661-744, trans. E. James, *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers* (rev. edn. Liverpool, 1991); *Liber in Gloria confessorum*, (*GC*) ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 744-820, trans. Van Dam, *Glory of the Confessors* (Liverpool, 1988).

³ Ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 857-872; chs. 1-16 trans. McDermott in Peters ed. *Monks* 209-218.

⁴ Ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 848-853, and ed. Krusch in B. Krusch and W. Levison eds., *SSRM* 7 (Hanover and New York, 1920) 761-769, trans. McDermott in Peters ed., *Monks* 199-206.

the Psalms, of which only fragments survive.⁵ He may also have written a *Vita* of Saint Andrew,⁶ although the authorship of this work has been contested. It is with the *DLH* that this thesis is concerned.

It responds to two very different works, the first an intensive literary study of the *DLH* itself, the second working from a more diffuse selection of sources to reinterpret the activities of Merovingian women. In a 1995 monograph, Martin Heinzelmann, already a renowned expert on Gregory's work, brought the study of Gregory's method and craft as a writer to a widely-acknowledged pinnacle. In *Gregor von Tours (538-594), "Zehn Bücher Geschichte": Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept in 6. Jahrhundert*,⁷ Heinzelmann produced a masterful and comprehensive study, elucidating a level of organisation and allusion within the *DLH* that had until this point been only hinted at. That Gregory was not to be trusted as a mere mirror of his society was no longer in serious doubt by the time of *Gregor von Tours*' publication: Heinzelmann's major contribution was to demonstrate the vast difference between a late twentieth-century view of the world, of history and the job of the historian, and that of the sixth-century bishop.

In her *Sans Peur et Sans Vergogne*, Nira Pancer, working within a rather more positivist tradition and inspired by anthropological approaches, used the *DLH* alongside a range of other sources to support her contention that women in the sixth and seventh

⁵ B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 874-877; also *PL* 71.1097-1098.

⁶ Ed. M. Bonnet *MGH SSRM* I.2 826-846, repr. with French trans. in Prieur ed. *Acta Andreae*, vol. 2, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Apocryphorum, vol. 6 (Brepols, 1989) 564-651.

⁷ (Darmstadt, 1994), and English trans. C. Carroll *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge, 2001). Page references throughout refer to the English translation.

centuries used acts of violence to participate in cycles of honour as equals to the men of their social class.⁸ Pancer was following a branch of gender studies that sought to investigate and challenge specific cultural assumptions about gender roles. As she asserts in the article “De-gendering female violence: Merovingian female honour as an ‘exchange of violence’”, the topic of women and violence tends to focus on women as victims: an anachronism, she suggests, as early mediaeval western society did not necessarily share the modern view that men are violent, while women usually are not.⁹

Yet these two lines of enquiry miss each other completely. Pancer’s work takes no account of Gregory as a writer, and thus, as the fruitful influence of literary theory has taught us, a conscious creator of the world presented in his work. The images of women that he gives us cannot be taken as simple reflections of women in “reality”. On the other side of the coin, the works on Gregory that *have* been strongly influenced by the “linguistic turn”, such as Heinzelmann’s, are largely gender blind. Despite the many notable passages featuring women in the *DLH*, there has been no comprehensive study on the role that they play, or of gender as a literary tool allowing for the expression of other ideas.¹⁰

This thesis redresses the balance, demonstrating for the first time, through a study of Gregory’s depiction of individual female figures, Gregory’s use of assumptions about women and gender relationships as a literary tool, used to represent a range of concepts.

⁸ N. Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne. De l’honneur et des femmes aux premiers temps mérovingiens* (Paris, 2001).

⁹ *EME* 11:1 (March, 2002) 1.

¹⁰ Pancer, likewise, does not take advantage of this development in gender studies.

That his writing was strongly influenced by the Bible has been noted,¹¹ but the extent to which his portrayal of women is indebted to this source has thus far been all but ignored. I will trace the influence of Biblical figures such as Woman Wisdom, the seductive and dangerous foreign woman, and the apostate nation of Israel, personified variously as a promiscuous young girl or adulterous wife. I have drawn here on the work of feminist Biblical scholars, who highlight the often unremarked tendency of Biblical writers to use female figures as literary tools to express a variety of ideas.

The advantages of exploring gender in the *DLH* are several: firstly and most obviously, a new level of sophistication in Gregory's writing will be exposed. Secondly, a new synergy can be demonstrated between Gregory's writing and his efforts to consolidate his authority; this thesis will show that gender was an essential literary tool. This will bring his objectives into sharper focus, with implications for the much-discussed chronology of the *DLH* composition. Thirdly, we will see gender relationships in flux over the course of the sixth century, as norms associated with the warband elite and the struggle to establish supremacy began to break down in the face of Christian gender expectations. The tension between these two sets of expectations can be seen to play out in the lives of the individual women who negotiated them.

¹¹ See for example Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours*; W. Monroe, "Via Iustitiae: the Biblical Sources of justice in Gregory of Tours", in *WGT* 99-112; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988, 2nd edn. Notre Dame, 2005. References are to the 2005 edn.) 112-234; Y. Hen, "The uses of the Bible and the perception of kingship in Merovingian Gaul" *EME* 7.3 (1998) 277-289; K. Mitchell, *History and Christian Society in Sixth-Century Gaul: an Historiographical Analysis of Gregory of Tours' Decem Libri Historiarum*, Doctoral Dissertation (Michigan, 1983); M. Reydellet, *La Royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Seville*, (Rome, 1981); F. Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours. Topoi und Wirklichkeit*, (Bern/Frankfurt, 1974).

The underlying theme of the thesis is violence. This is partly suggested by the materials to hand: the *DLH* is punctuated by many acts of violence: warfare, vengeance, torture, and the elite women in the *DLH* appear to participate with the same enthusiasm as their men, while women and men of all levels of society are shown on the receiving end. By widening the term “violence” to include speech, I am able to discuss women as instigators of violence. This leads me to the wider area of the significance of women’s speech, and the equally vital question of their silence in suffering. Violence in our own culture is heavily gendered: it is largely presumed to be the province of men, but not women. The violence found in the *DLH* was governed by competing discourses: over the course of the sixth century, the increasing influence of Christian gender norms meant that violence committed or encouraged by women, for which there was apparently a sanctioned place within the aggressively expansionist early Merovingian kingdom, became less and less acceptable.

The current thesis

The first chapter of this thesis explores the bibliographical landscape, outlining the state of research in the various fields of scholarship crucial to the present study. These are of course Gregory studies, and more specifically, those studies influenced by linguistic approaches, which make Gregory’s literary craft the primary topic of investigation. Also vital, and examined in relation to Gregory’s *DLH* for the first time in this thesis, are gender studies. Feminist biblical scholarship, as a subset of gender studies, is also extremely useful.

Each of the four main chapters (two to five) has a named “heroine” around whom the issues being examined will be discussed. Alongside Gregory’s “use” of each character, the woman herself will be discussed, as she finds her way through the sometimes competing ideologies that defined her role. Chapter three is the exception, as Gregory’s Arian characters are too one-dimensional for a study of the woman beyond the image to be realistically possible.

Chapter two is concerned with the establishment of the latest incarnation of God’s kingdom on earth, under the rulership of the dynasty that would come to be known as the Merovingians. This chapter will demonstrate for the first time that the earliest kings’ interactions with their consorts helped to establish the various elements of their kingship. Words are vital: the words of Basina to Childeric affirm his warlike abilities, while Clovis’ conversion to Catholicism is partly credited to the persuasive words of his wife, Clothild. It will become clear that this anecdote, which will be examined in some depth, is heavily stylised, drawing on the Biblical figure of Woman Wisdom. It is partly intended, I will suggest, to deflect attention from inexpedient evidence that Clovis may have converted for reasons other than simple spiritual zeal. Gregory also used the character of Clothild to cement the relationship between the success of the Merovingian dynasty and the respect shown to St. Martin of Tours by the kings. Gregory was holding up a clear example to the kings of his own day, and in doing so, consolidating his own authority.

The third chapter explores the theme of heresy. Just as the Israelites were punished for idolatry, so Gregory fears that the Merovingians will suffer for their pursuit of the false god of worldly gain. The contemporaneous example of heresy that he holds up is Arianism. Not only does he make clear, using lessons from recent history, that Arians have been punished for their faith just as Catholics have been rewarded for theirs, but he turns Arianism into an active threat. Catholic princesses who have travelled to the Visigothic kingdom to marry are shown at the mercy of aggressive Arian proselytisers. These princesses stand for the threatened integrity of the Catholic Church as a whole. Arianism is also personified in the form of Gothic queens, in a way reminiscent of the recurring Biblical motif, found in several Old Testament books, of the foreign female who tempts the Israelite male away from the true faith. Tales of monstrous heretical women buoy up Gallo-Roman ideals of feminine behaviour. In representations of Arianism versus Catholicism, Gregory attaches symbolic value to the female body. Thus, this chapter benefits from anthropological ideas about the human body – particularly the female – as a representation of society.¹²

Of all the four main chapters, Chapter four is the one that is most strongly focused on a single female character: Fredegund, wife of Chilperic (†584). This chapter discusses Gregory's own episcopate, particularly in its early years. Fresh perspective is given to Gregory's establishment of his own position, and it is argued that Fredegund (†597) and Chilperic form a Biblically-inspired "double-act" of wicked king and queen, moulded as a counterpoint to Gregory's image of himself: the just, fearless prophet, motivated only

¹² See for example ideas discussed by M. Douglas, in her *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966 and repr. London and New York, 2002; page references are to the 2002 edition).

by his desire to serve God. It is proposed that Gregory's depiction of Fredegund as violent and exercising undue influence over her husband was intended primarily as an indictment of Chilperic himself, and that the resemblance that Fredegund's behaviour bore to that of the Arian women of earlier Books may have been intended to help express concerns about Chilperic's orthodoxy. In the *DLH*'s account, Fredegund becomes after her husband's death an almost cartoon-like archetype of a wicked woman, who was, as will be shown, still a politically useful tool. In representing Chilperic's wife, Gregory made use of fears surrounding the figure of a queen and the possible negative influence that she might exercise over her husband, as well as drawing on ideas surrounding the figure of the wicked stepmother. After Chilperic's death, Gregory continued to use these and other gendered ideas to blacken her character thoroughly. It will be suggested that Gregory wished to turn Fredegund into a villain that Childebert (†595) and Guntram (†592) could agree on. This, he hoped, would smooth over the uncomfortable fact of Childebert's previous alliance with Fredegund's husband, Chilperic, allowing Guntram and Childebert to move forward to their own alliance.

The final chapter takes as its topic Gregory's ideas about the Day of Judgement. Once again, women are used as a vehicle for other ideas. Nuns were useful to churchmen in their thinking about salvation; the chaste nun could be imagined as a type of the purified eschatological Church. Patristic sources frequently refer to the Church as the Bride of Christ, and nuns were imagined as being individually and collectively married to Christ also. In the last two Books of the *DLH* one particular incident, a revolt involving nuns at the Ste. Croix monastery in Poitiers in 589, is given apocalyptic significance.

This chapter of the thesis will revisit the theme of bodily boundaries as representing the boundaries of the Church, this time in the context of the Last Days.

While it has been noted that Biblical typology played a big part in Gregory's understanding and presentation of his world, the influence of this method in his portrayal of women has been largely ignored. Chapters two to five of this thesis make clear that the women of the *DLH* are not to be taken at face value. They are obscured by a good deal of stylization, and are made to carry a weighty symbolic burden. It is my contention that a full appreciation of who women are and what they "do" in Gregory's *DLH* cannot be achieved without an understanding of the literary hoops through which their characters are being made to jump. That the Bible influenced churchmen in their many writings is self-evident. Women, and assumptions about gender, were central to the thought-world of the Biblical writers, and thus must be considered a vital weapon in the literary arsenal of any writer who took the Old Testament in particular as inspiration. At every stage, women and gender help Gregory to solidify his moral case, and thus help to strengthen his position as Bishop of Tours. A study of Gregory's work which incorporates gender approaches must therefore have implications for some of the most vital points of contention surrounding his oeuvre, including the motivation behind the *DLH*'s beginning, and thus, the order of composition.

Gregory made use of a set of assumptions about gender that he confidently expected would be shared by the clerical elite for whom the *DLH* was primarily written.¹³ These assumptions were not, however, shared in their entirety by the Merovingians who

¹³ *Quod si te, o sacerdos Dei.. (DLH X.31, MGH SSRM 536.8).*

were his most prominent protagonists. Nevertheless, Gregory has left us enough clues to allow us to penetrate the obfuscating mists of his own moral universe. There is a certain tension between his expectations and the way in which the high-status females of the *DLH* behave. If looking for the “real” women of the *DLH* is a rather redundant activity, we can at least see the interplay of the often contradictory, though still gendered, ideals that such women were required to negotiate in sixth-century Gaul. This thesis makes clear that gender is not only a useful tool of analysis; it is essential.

Chapter 1

Historiographical Contexts

Introduction

Scholarship on Gregory's work has been a lively field, particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Scholars have found literary approaches to Gregory's œuvre to be particularly illuminating; however, gender has yet to make its mark, despite the fruitful symbiosis of gender and literary studies in many other areas of historical research. This chapter outlines recent scholarship in both areas, and makes clear that the use of both approaches in conjunction is not only advantageous, but necessary to a fuller understanding of Gregory's purpose and method in the *DLH*. Gregory was influenced by the Bible, and, as will be shown, he shared a discourse of gender assumptions with those Biblical writers to whose works he referred, whether the reference was explicit or implicit. This gender discourse was also shared with his clerical successors at Tours, to whom the *DLH* was bequeathed.

Gregory studies

Until relatively recently, the accepted way to approach Gregory was as a naïve storyteller, bearing faithful witness in his jumbled style to the turbulent times in which he lived. His own words encourage us to take this view: several of his works make reference to the weaknesses of his writing; he is no great stylist, he tells us, and can only present the momentous events of his times, the miracles and slaughters, in the humblest

language.¹ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians who sought to reach kernels of absolute truth in the sources they studied, had cause to lament the loose relationship between Gregory's work and what the few other contemporary sources suggested to be "fact". There was also a tendency to take Gregory's protestations about the inadequacies of his style at face value. Historians saw failings in his Latin and incoherence in his structure.² The miracle stories presented a particular problem, as nineteenth-century scholars, influenced by scientific movements, condemned these writings as credulous nonsense. For such scholars, the title *History of the Franks*, given to the work by seventh-century copyists, made perfect sense: it was a history of the Frankish people that they wished the work to provide.

Later, more nuanced studies of Gregory's work benefited from interdisciplinary approaches. Students of Gregory's work, influenced by the work of literary historians, began to consider Gregory's craft, as well as the purpose of his *DLH*. Max Bonnet in 1890 had indicated the importance of the Psalms for Gregory's work,³ but at this point historians were no closer to finding its overall organising principle. In 1920, Louis

¹ *DLH* I.Pref, which features an apology to his readers for any offence caused. 'Sed prius veniam legentibus praecor, si aut in litteris aut in sillabis grammaticam artem excessero, de qua adplene non sum inbutus' 'but first I beg pardon of my readers, if by either letter or syllable I exceed the strictures of grammar, with which skill I am not fully imbued' (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 3.17-19). Further references to his lack of skill can be found in *DLH* Gen. Pref., *VM* 1, Prol., *GC* Prol., and *VP* Prol. He is far more defensive in the prologue to *GM*, where he states his intention to steer clear of classical works, due to their lack of spiritual merit. His list of the works he means to avoid makes it more than clear that he was in fact learned, and is avoiding such works through choice rather than ignorance.

² For an introduction to some of these scholars, see G. de Nie, "Introduction: 'in a mixed and muddled manner'?" *Views from a Many-windowed Tower: Studies in the Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 1987) 1-26. An excellent bibliography is provided by Walter Goffart. The 2005 paperback edition also contains an updated bibliography at pp. xxii-xxvi, including works of note not cited in the earlier edition. Goffart also cites online bibliographies, to be found at <http://spectrum.troy.edu/~ajones/gotbibl.htm> or <http://spectrum.troy.edu/%7Eajones/gotbibl.html>.

³ M. Bonnet, *Le latin de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris, 1890).

Halphen detected a degree of literary fabrication in Gregory's writings, which served the interests of the edification of the church.⁴ He also noted a tendency towards Biblical patterning of events, as well as a penchant for links between episodes of Merovingian history. He did not, however, identify this as a technique, nor did he address the question of why Gregory might have made use of such an approach. In 1926, Samuel Dill declared that he was "inclined to think that Gregory is much more of a literary and historical artist than modern critics will allow."⁵ Yet the image of Gregory as artless and affable mirror of his age prevailed as late as the 1974 English translation of Gregory's historical work, which still bore the title of *The History of the Franks*. Lewis Thorpe tells us in the introduction to this edition that Gregory's words "have a simple narrative function, they tell a story."⁶ He does, however, note that Gregory liked to include invented speeches to heighten the dramatic moment on occasion.⁷ The recognition that Gregory had an eye for the dramatic apparently did not lead Thorpe to ponder on other possible manifestations of his creativity.

In 1951 J. M. Wallace-Hadrill suggested that Gregory collected stories for his fellow clerics at Tours, present and future, and also for the edification of pilgrims visiting Tours;⁸ Walter Goffart, writing in 1988, saw Gregory's project as the recording of "the historical experience of his generation, set in the perspective of a summarily filled-in

⁴ L. Halphen, "Grégoire de Tours, historien de Clovis" *Mélanges d'histoire du moyen âge offerts à F. Lot* (Paris, 1925) 244.

⁵ S. Dill, *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age*, (London, 1926) 348.

⁶ "Introduction" to Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. L. Thorpe (London, 1974) 41.

⁷ L. Thorpe, "Introduction" 34.

⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* 69.

past.”⁹ Both objectives might go some way to explaining his (mis)handling of the baptism of Clovis (†511), which has proved to be one of the most controversial anecdotes in the entire work.¹⁰ Ian Wood has shown that Gregory was probably in possession of information that he chose not to use,¹¹ so it follows that Gregory used a version of events which suited his own aims. That there was indeed some underlying structure is suggested by Gregory’s plea to those into whose hands his œuvre might fall to keep the work intact.¹² He himself clearly felt that there was some significance which would be lost if any part of the work were to be excised.

The idea of a simple Gregory has been robustly challenged by a succession of authors over the past four decades, among them Kathleen Mitchell, Walter Goffart, Giselle de Nie and Ian Wood.¹³ Most recently, Guy Halsall was able to demonstrate a level of rhetorical finesse in the Preface to *DLH* V¹⁴ that must now see the guileless Gregory definitively laid to rest as “a creature of romantic literary criticism.”¹⁵ He did protest his rustic artlessness a little too much. After reaching the consensus that Gregory

⁹ Goffart, *Narrators* 166.

¹⁰ See D. Shanzer, “Dating the Baptism of Clovis: the Bishop of Vienne vs. the Bishop of Tours”, *EME* 7.1 (March 1998) 29-57; I. Wood, “The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours”, *RBPH* 71 (1993) 253-270; “Gregory of Tours and Clovis”, *RBPH* 63 (1985) 249-272, and repr. in L. K. Little and H. B. Rosenwein eds., *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, 1998) 73-91.

¹¹ Wood, “Gregory of Tours and Clovis” 260-3.

¹² *DLH* X.31.

¹³ Goffart, *Narrators*; Wood, “The Secret Histories”; de Nie, *Views*; Mitchell, *History and Christian Society*.

¹⁴ G. Halsall, “The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours’ *DLH*: Its Form, Context and Significance”, *EHR* 2007 CXXII (496) 297-317.

¹⁵ Goffart, *Narrators* 115.

was indeed a shaper and creator of the world around him, rather than a simple reporter, scholars engaged with the problem of how, if at all, Gregory's work was organized.

The linguistic turn

The 'linguistic turn', an intellectual movement through which writers came to recognise 'language as the primary problem of academic research and debate'¹⁶ was to have a profound effect on the study of history. In his 1973 work *Metahistory*, Hayden White, one of the linguistic turn's leading proponents, described the writing of history as an "artistic exercise", bound by the demands of one of four particular styles: Comedy, Tragedy, Satire and Romance.¹⁷ Linguistic approaches expose a level of artifice in every decision taken when writing an historical work: in simply choosing a start and end date one imposes artificial boundaries.¹⁸ Literature should therefore be understood as being constitutive of, rather than constituted by, the world it inhabits.¹⁹ This distinction is particularly important for the study of the early Middle Ages, in which the scarcity of sources can result in a particular work being relied on rather too heavily for "facts" about the period it represents. For example, because Gregory of Tours' work has done much to create the "reality" of sixth-century Gaul for those who undertake to study it, there is a temptation to assume – or to hope – that his work is a faithful representation. Any attempt

¹⁶ C. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (Harlow, 2005) 47.

¹⁷ H. White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973) 7.

¹⁸ "Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning?" (H. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (collected essays, Baltimore and London, 1987) 24.

¹⁹ G. Spiegel, "History, post-modernism and the social logic of the text in the Middle Ages", *Speculum* 65 (1990) 60. The work of Michel Foucault has been very influential here. See his *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969).

at a description of historical events must however be partially imaginative.²⁰ Postmodern literary approaches have robustly challenged the idea that it is possible to find “authentic” meaning in historical texts.²¹ This is still, understandably, debated.²² The relative paucity of sources for the early mediaeval period meant that its students remained preoccupied with establishing sources’ “reliability” long after historians of other periods had begun to utilise other approaches.²³ Nevertheless, this very paucity does suggest the desirability of using those sources that we *do* have more creatively.

Walter Goffart was one of the first historians in the early mediaeval field to be influenced by the linguistic turn. His *Narrators of Barbarian History* (1988) took four early mediaeval texts, of which the *DLH* was one, and argued that they should be read as literary arguments, each of which interpreted their society’s past in order to make a point about the present. Goffart suggested that Gregory presented a chaotic world in order to create a satirical image. Satire paints a distorted image of the world in order to reveal its

²⁰ L. S. Kramer, ‘Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra’, in A. Biersack and L. Avery Hunt (eds), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 101.

²¹ Spiegel, “History” 59. When this article was written, with the notable exception of Spiegel herself, much of the creative theorising in the field had been carried out by literary critics rather than by historians. Historians had been relied on to provide a stable context against which to test increasingly complex literary theories. But, says Spiegel, history itself has “layers of discursive displacements and heterogeneous meanings” and “[e]vents are not necessarily any more logical, less ridden with contradiction and hidden intentions, than speech or writing.” (73).

²² The full implications of the linguistic turn have perhaps still to be grasped by most historians. (See W. Pohl, “The Construction of Communities and the Persistence of Paradox: an Introduction” in R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz eds., *The Construction of Community in the Early Middle Ages* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003) 2-3.) Taking the tenets of the literary turn to their logical, if extreme, conclusion brings us to the point at which objective “reality” cannot be said to exist outside the text which describes it. Historians have largely withdrawn from the more extreme implications of this position, which would render historical research all but pointless.

²³ White suggests, drawing on Nietzsche, that the desire to find the one definition of “truth” was “another vestige of the Christian need to believe in the one true God – or of Christianity’s secular counterpart, Positivist science, with its need to believe in a single, complete and completely true body of natural laws” (*Metahistory* 332).

true moral nature. Certain qualities are exaggerated in order that the more unflattering aspects of society and its main players may be exposed.²⁴ Joaquín Martínez Pizarro suggests however that there is little evidence for the use of satire in sixth-century Gaul.²⁵ The satire theory also presupposes that the author distanced himself somewhat from the world around him, observing the “subnormal” events reported from a more elevated moral position.²⁶ However, it seems likely that, as an active metropolitan bishop, Gregory would have been rather more involved with the spiritual welfare of his society than a satirical approach would suggest.

Taking as a start point the idea that much of what he described was intended to serve as a series of moral lessons, Gregory’s approach begins to be far more explicable. He insists, several times, that his writing style is inadequate. However, such protestations were a well-worn trope which in themselves signalled the writer’s familiarity with the finer points of style. Heinzelmann points out that Gregory was critical of others who used rustic speech, for example the “false prophet” of IX.6. He considers himself well enough educated to criticise the theological dabbings of Chilperic,²⁷ and issues a pun about the rhythm of the king’s poetry as having no “feet” to stand on. He justifies his own shortcomings by saying that his simple writing style might be more readily appreciated

²⁴ Ibid.199. In the preface to the 2005 edition of *Narrators*, Goffart de-emphasizes satire, saying that “[w]ithout ceasing to believe that satire as a literary category is relevant to an appreciation of Gregory’s work”, it is comparatively non-essential, and other authors have tended to focus on it and used it to dismiss the rest of the book (xxii).

²⁵ J. M. Pizarro, “Ethnic and National History ca. 500-1000” in D. M. Deliyannis ed., *Historiography in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2003) 55. He also suggests that “satire in the form of a prose history in ten books would have been so unprecedented in Gregory’s time (as in any other) that it would have obscured and blunted the moral message associated with the genre.”

²⁶ Bruce Brasingstoke found Goffart’s interpretation “engaging, but based on conjecture” (review of Goffart, *Narrators*, in *Comitatus* (1988) 106.

²⁷ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 95.

by a wider audience, which suggests that perhaps the Latin Gregory uses is reflective of the style used in his own time. It was also reminiscent of the unadorned style of the Bible, and Gregory could thus lay claim to a similar authority for his own work. Such language was suited to the recounting of great deeds and miracles, which needed no embellishment, and thus his style served admirably his purpose of imparting moral wisdom. His writing was “untouched by artifice and, so, endowed with supernatural trenchancy.”²⁸

As Peter Brown demonstrated in 1978,²⁹ and Adriaan Breukelaar in 1994, the bolstering of episcopal authority was high on Gregory’s agenda.³⁰ However, the most illuminating work on Gregory’s œuvre recognises that, in terms of modern categorisation, Gregory was himself writing from an “interdisciplinary” point of view. In 1983, Kathleen Mitchell called for a study of Gregory’s works which encompassed “an analysis of his historical and religious ideas and the context in which he wrote them.”³¹ She saw Gregory as a writer as well as a bishop, who wrote not only for the purpose of instruction, but simply to create. In order to fully understand the lessons Gregory wished to impart, a fuller appreciation of his style and the literary devices he employed must be highly beneficial.

²⁸ P. Brown, “Introduction” in *WGT* 7. The style may, as Pizarro suggests, have been “part of a Christian polemic against standards of Latinity associated with pagan and secular literature” (“Ethnic and National History ca. 500-1000”, in D. M. Deliyannis ed., *Historiography in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2003) 53).

²⁹ P. Brown, *Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours* (Reading, 1976).

³⁰ A. Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Gottingen, 1994) 13.

³¹ Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 7.

Gregory's typology

Beryl Smalley identified in the writings of Origen four “types” which would go on to influence early mediaeval history writing: prophecies of the coming of Christ; prophecies of the Church and her sacraments; prophecies of the Last Things and the Kingdom of Heaven; and figures of the relationship between God and the individual soul, exemplified in the history of the chosen people.³² Some early medieval writers sought to situate their work within the great drama of all human history, with the creation of the world in the beginning, Christ's Incarnation and Passion in the middle, and the Second Coming and Judgment Day at the end. Before Christ, his coming was revealed to the prophets, as detailed in the Old Testament, and afterwards He was imitated by the saints.³³ Everything that happens in all history is, in principle, contained within this, and “all the heights and depths of human conduct and all the heights and depths of stylistic expression find their morally or aesthetically established right to exist” in relation to this.³⁴ Everything in history points to aspects or components of the “Great Drama”.

In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Eric Auerbach further explored the importance of typology for the Christian interpretation of history. Auerbach defined typology as a device highlighting that “every occurrence, in all its everyday reality, is simultaneously a part in a world-historical context through which each part is related to every other, and thus likewise is to be regarded as being of all times

³² B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964) 6.

³³ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton, 1946) 156.

³⁴ Auerbach, *Mimesis* 158.

and above all time.”³⁵ Auerbach pointed out that “[i]n God there is no distinction of time since for Him everything is a simultaneous present.”³⁶ For this reason, chronology is unimportant. Although Auerbach discussed Gregory’s work in *Mimesis*, he did not see him as making use of this technique. He saw Gregory as unconcerned with literary ambition, and it is because he is “no longer burdened by unrealizable pretensions, that Gregory’s soul faces living reality, ready to apprehend it as such and to work in it practically.”³⁷ Auerbach fell victim, then, to suppositions about Gregory’s artlessness.

It was Felix Thürlemann who devoted a monograph to Gregory’s use of typology, noting not only Gregory’s use of the Bible, but the typological connections drawn between parts of his own work, including connections between the *DLH* and *Miracula*, reminding us once again of the possible fruitfulness of a comprehensive study encompassing both genres of Gregory’s work, which has still not been undertaken. In Thürlemann’s analysis of the actions of Chlothar in battle against his son, he noted that Gregory envisaged his protagonists knowingly likening their own actions to those of Biblical antetypes.³⁸ Chlothar, about to do battle with his son Chramn, raises his eyes to heaven and asks that God might grant the same judgment to him as he once did to King David in the battle against his rebellious son Absalom.³⁹ The appeal to God is of course what saves Chlothar, but does his destiny owe something to the battle of his Biblical predecessor? Thürlemann’s work does not appear to have been widely influential: in her 1983 thesis,

³⁵ Auerbach, *Mimesis* 156.

³⁶ Ibid. 156.

³⁷ Ibid. 94.

³⁸ Thürlemann, *Der historische* 90.

³⁹ II Samuel 15-18.

Mitchell gave a nod towards Gregory's typology, noting that St. Martin is linked to Christ,⁴⁰ but did not explore this further. Goffart, similarly, did not engage fully with Thürlemann's findings. Nevertheless, the way was opened for a comprehensive study of Gregory's typology.

Martin Heinzelmann

"How those of us who wanted to know "how it actually was" will bemoan the passing of the old Gregory" pronounced Richard Gerberding, in his review of Martin Heinzelmann's 1996 monograph.⁴¹ Gerberding alluded to Heinzelmann's exposure of the vast difference between Gregory's understanding of "truth" and the writing of history, and that of the late twentieth-century historian. Heinzelmann showed clearly that Gregory shaped the history of his own time, explaining it in terms of the activity of God in the world.⁴² Here, he followed the example of Orosius.⁴³ Expanding on Thürlemann's ideas on typology, Heinzelmann integrated these with a consideration of the structure of the work as a whole. The bishops of Nicaea had argued that any correct interpretation of Scripture would carry the authority of Scripture itself.⁴⁴ Gregory's typological references

⁴⁰ Mitchell, *History and Society* 66.

⁴¹ R. A. Gerberding, review of *Gregor von Tours*, in *Speculum* Vol. 71, no. 4 (Oct., 1996) 959-961.

⁴² Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 105.

⁴³ Pizarro, "Ethnic and National History" 55-56, drawing on the work of K. F. Werner, who interpreted *historia* as a "late antique / early medieval kind of Christian historiography that takes its inspiration from Orosius and the historical books of the Old Testament, especially the Books of Kings. *Historia* is not national or ethnic in subject, but centers instead on the functioning of a Christian society and very particularly on the duties of its rulers, who – in association with the priests of God – lead the people towards salvation" (see K. F. Werner, "Gott, Herrscher und Historiograph: Der Geschichtsschreiber als Interpret des Wirken Gottes in der Welt und Ratgeber der Könige (4. bis 12. Jahrhundert)", in *Deus qui mutat tempora. Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Alfons Becker zu seinem fünfundsiebszigsten Geburtstag*, ed. E. D. Hehl et al (Sigmaringen, 1987) 1-31.

⁴⁴ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 122.

reinterpret the vitality of Scripture for his own time, continuing in time-honoured tradition to relate contemporary events and people to the eternal story of Creation, Incarnation and Passion, and finally Second Coming and Judgment Day. Thus the continuing vitality of the story is confirmed, Scripture is successfully and correctly reinterpreted and Gregory's work has the authority of Scripture itself. This gives a new purpose to the four "framing" books which preface the six contemporary books. They are of crucial importance, as the select Israelite history of Book I gives the series of typological references which give Merovingian characters and sixth-century events their historical significance.

In this way, Chilperic and Fredegund become the new Ahab and Jezebel, who persecute a new prophet Elias in bishop Praetextatus of Rouen. After Chilperic's death in 585, Guntram is portrayed as a new Hezekiah, with the chaos surrounding his reign representing the "ills of Jerusalem."⁴⁵ Gregory's sovereign at this point was in fact King Childebert II, the son of Sigibert (†585). However, he chooses not to follow the career of this king, which presumably was not suited to the plan of his work. Gregory himself is cast, not as himself, but as an Old Testament prophet.⁴⁶ As Gerberding notes, "the existence of the Biblical paradigm 'proves' the significance of the earthly figure."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Heinzelmänn, *Gregory of Tours* 57. Although for one so steeped in knowledge of the Bible, and the way in which all history related to it, this is probably an entirely genuine representation of the way in which Gregory experienced history and interpreted his own place in it.

⁴⁶ This characterization has been cited as the reason for the relative lack of autobiographical detail in the *DLH* (Heinzelmänn, *Gregory of Tours* 36). Much of the information that we have about Gregory's family and early life has been gleaned instead from the *Miracula* (see Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 52-62).

⁴⁷ Gerberding, review of Heinzelmänn, *Gregor von Tours* 961.

It is typology, Heinzelmann argued, which gives us the clue as to the overall structure of the *DLH*; its beginning, middle and end. All history leads from Creation to Final Judgment, with Christ, and those who foresee and afterwards those who imitate Him, in between. Contemporary history points to Biblical, and contemporary portents warn of the days to come. Thus the “digressions” – sightings of great wonders, and miracles associated with saints – take on a significance of their own in relation to the whole, and are revealed as vital in the construction of the writer’s philosophy. The meetings of bishops in the last two books of the *DLH* point backwards to the Council of Nicaea, and simultaneously forwards to the community of saints who make up the *ecclesia*, and who will be present at the Last Judgment.⁴⁸

While clearly a work of great importance for Gregory studies, there are some limitations to Heinzelmann’s analysis. A nuance to his view that Gregory styled the great figures of his own time in order to make them represent Biblical types can be found in an article by Philip Wynn. Wynn examined books I-IV of the *DLH* for examples of Biblical allusions in descriptions of warfare. However, the connections highlighted by Wynn suggest not an interest in linking important figures to specific Biblical characters, but rather a desire to give a more generalized Biblical flavour. Thus, Attila’s invasion of Gaul was “based on the generalised Biblical pattern of the invasion of a decadent Israel by chastising *gentes*, a prophetic response, and the appearance of a deliverer, which corresponds to the narrative pattern in the Book of Judges, as well as other Old Testament

⁴⁸ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 77.

associations.”⁴⁹ Gregory’s kings, for example, are linked with different Biblical characters as occasion demands: thus Chlothar I, though famously linked with King David⁵⁰ as he goes onto the battlefield to fight his own son,⁵¹ had earlier been associated with a completely different Biblical passage. In *DLH* IV.14, as he calls on his men to honour the treaty he had just made with the rebellious Saxons, saying: ‘*Dissistete, quaeso, ab his hominibus, ne super nos Dei ira concitetur*’⁵² he recalls the reply of the princes to the people of Israel, who were disenchanted with the treaty with Gibeon in Joshua 9.19-20.⁵³ Perhaps Gregory’s approach to Biblical allusion was more free-flowing than Heinzelmann’s analysis allows, with the lives of characters resembling different Biblical types or events as seemed most germane to the point he wished to convey.

Neither Wynn nor Heinzelmann gave any consideration to gender; a vital tool for many of the writers of the Books of the Bible, and surely therefore to be considered in a study of a work now agreed to rely heavily on the Bible’s influence. In fact, Wynn’s suggestions are particularly useful for the study of women, who tend to leave a far less coherent historical record than their male counterparts. Gregory’s *DLH* is typical in this respect; women generally appear where their lives intersect with those of powerful men, or, as this thesis will show, when a particular argument was being put forward. The disjointed nature of a given woman’s appearances in the *DLH* allows for greater scope for

⁴⁹ P. Wynn, “Wars and Warriors in Gregory’s *DLH* I-IV”, *Francia* 28/1 (2001) 5.

⁵⁰ II Samuel 18.

⁵¹ *DLH* IV.20.

⁵² *MGH SSRM* I.1, 146.10-11. “I beg you, let these men be, lest the wrath of God be aroused against us.” English translations my own, unless otherwise stated.

⁵³ Wynn, “Wars and Warriors” 8.

her character to be manipulated to suit Gregory's purpose. For example, although Clothild (†544) appears in Book II as a type of "Woman Wisdom"⁵⁴, presenting Clovis with the opportunity to demonstrate good judgment, she later appears to emulate Esther,⁵⁵ urging her sons to engage in a just war.⁵⁶ Clearly, there is scope for a thorough exploration of the role played by gender in the *DLH*.

Gender in history

The study of the *DLH* has benefitted greatly from interdisciplinary approaches. The goal of this thesis, as its title suggests, is to add gender studies to the mix for the first time. "Gender" is a highly contentious term, still attracting great debate as to its meaning and usage. Gender allows for a line to be drawn between the incontrovertible facts of biological difference, and the cultural assumptions imposed onto this,⁵⁷ which sometimes vary greatly over space and time. "Gender" is comprised of these assumptions. For example, women's usual comparative lack of physical strength is often perceived as evidence of a correlated feebleness of mind, both of which together necessitate their protection and control by men.⁵⁸ In this incarnation, the problematisation of "gender" is clearly highly political, seeking to expose as false any assumption that the fact of genital difference predestined a person to a given life path.

⁵⁴ Proverbs 1-9.

⁵⁵ Esther 8-9.

⁵⁶ *DLH* III.5.

⁵⁷ Judith Butler has however challenged the heterocentric assumptions of this definition in her *Gender Trouble* (New York, 1990).

⁵⁸ See for example J. Kelly, "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History", in *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976) 809-823; G. Rubin, "The traffic in women", in R. R. Reiter ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York, 1975) 157-210.

Gender has significance for history on several different fronts. Granting a new subjectivity to historical events, it has helped to move the discipline beyond the reductive study of great men and great events. Acknowledging that women and men might experience history's traditionally "great events" very differently calls the very status of such events into question. In her seminal 1976 essay "Did Women have a Renaissance?", Joan Kelly argued that such were the progressive disadvantages suffered by women in Italy over the period 1350-1530 that women cannot, in fact, be said to have had a Renaissance at all.⁵⁹ Life changed, certainly, but the overwhelming positivity usually associated with the term "Renaissance" does not, Kelly argued, apply when discussing the experience of women who saw many of their freedoms curtailed. Julia Smith revived the question of traditional periodization in 2001, this time asking "Did Women have a Transformation of the Roman World?" Smith suggested the possibility that much greater nuance, on various fronts, could be given to the study of the period in question if gendered experience were to be considered.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ J. Kelly, "Did Women have a Renaissance?", in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. R. Bridenthall, C. Coonz and S. Stuard (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1976) 139-64, and repr. in J. Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory: the Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1986) 19-50. See also a useful summary in G. Block, "Women's history and gender history: aspects of an international debate", in *Gender and History* 1.1 (1989) 7-30, and repr. in R. Shoemaker and M. Vincent eds., *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, 1998) 25-42. Further bibliography can be found in E. van Houts, "The state of research: women in medieval history and literature", *JMH* 20 (1994) 277-92; J. Nelson, "Family, Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages", in Michael Bentley ed., *Companion to Historiography* (London and New York, 1997) 153-176; M. Rubin, "A decade of studying medieval women", *HWJ* 46 (1998) 213-239; and most recently, J. M. H. Smith, "Introduction", *GEMW* 1-19.

⁶⁰ J. M. H. Smith, "Did Women have a Transformation of the Roman World?", in P. Stafford and A. B. Mulder-Bakker eds., *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts, 2001) 22-36. See now A. Shepard and G. Walker eds., *Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology and Periodisation*, Gender and History Special Issue (Oxford, 2009).

Men and women in a given society were defined in relation to one another.⁶¹ Gender as a relational category problematises masculinity, which throughout history has been taken as the norm against which femininity has been measured. Taking a gendered approach to historical texts also allows us to examine women's role in the creation of this image of masculinity.⁶² Even in the most masculine of cultures, wives and mothers act as cultural agents, in part through their education of children.⁶³ In chapter two of this thesis we will see Clothild encouraging her sons in an act of vengeance. While goading can be understood as gendered,⁶⁴ presupposing a woman's inability to take matters into her own hands, this particular incident can be read as a queen mother encouraging her oldest son in particular to prove himself as a worthy successor to his warrior father. So that most "masculine" of ideals, the warlord, was partly propagated by the queen, mother of future warrior-kings.

⁶¹ J. W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review* vol. 91, no. 5 (Dec 1986) 1054.

⁶² Works which have discussed masculinity include C. A. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994); J. J. Cohen and B. Wheeler eds., *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997); D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1999); D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford, 2009); L. L. Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia, 2010). For further bibliography, see Smith, "Introduction", in *GEMW* 27. Other studies have taken issue with the male-female dichotomy, looking for a more complex understanding of gender which encompasses the transvestite, eunuch etc. There has been more work done here by students of Byzantium, where the eunuch was very much a part of court life (see L. James ed., *Men, Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London and New York, 1997)). Rather more tentative attempts have been made to address the topic with regard to early Medieval Western Europe: for example, some work has been done on the figure of the woman who dresses as a man in order to enter a monastery – a hagiographic trope (see for example S. Loware, "To rise beyond their sex: female cross-dressing saints in Caxton's *Vitas Patrum*", in T. Honegger ed, *Riddles, Knights and Cross-Dressing Saints: Essays in Medieval English Language and Literature* (Bern, 2004) 55-94, and V. L. Bullough, "Cross dressing and gender role change in the Middle Ages", in V. L. Bullough and J. A. Brundage eds., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York, 1996) 223-242).

⁶³ Smith, "Did Women have a Transformation of the Roman World?" 36. See also J. Nelson, "Dhuoda", in J. L. Nelson and P. Wormald eds., *Lay intellectuals in the Carolingian world* (Cambridge, 2008) 106-120.

⁶⁴ The bloodfeud as described in some Icelandic sagas makes a useful comparison here. See for example C. Anderson, "No Fixed Point: gender and blood feuds in Njal's saga", *PQ* vol. 81 no. 4 (Fall 2002) 422-3 and W. I. Miller, "Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England", *LHR* (1983) 159-204.

The vast majority of early mediaeval texts were written by men; masculinity in these texts is the norm against which the “Other” of femininity is measured. Archaeology can give nuance to the image presented by literature: the grave goods with which a person is buried give clues as to the components of masculinity in a given society. One example of the work being done here is that of Guy Halsall, who has argued that the changing construction of masculinity in the Late Antique West was connected to, and so has value for the study of, social and political change. Archaeological evidence from Gaul from the late fourth century shows that elite men were buried with gender-specific grave goods representing one of the two choices of career open to them: belt sets and brooches, linking them to the imperial bureaucracy and to a civic career, or weaponry associating them with the military.⁶⁵ For such men, the conduct of wives was also important – only men whose houses were in order could be thought suitable to impose order in other spheres⁶⁶ – thus women had burial goods which appeared to connect them strongly to the family, their devotion to their properly designated sphere reflecting well on their husband’s ability to govern. Grave goods clearly had more to say about how a family wished to be perceived than about any objective reality, but this is still vital for the study of idealised gender roles.

⁶⁵ “Gender and the End of Empire”, *JMEMS* 34:1 (Winter 2001) 26. By the end of the fifth century, men could no longer look to connections with Rome to legitimize their authority, and grave goods from this time begin to reflect identity along the ethnic lines – whether Roman or Frankish – within Gaul. Halsall states that though ethnic identity pertained entirely to adult males initially, by the end of the sixth century female grave goods were beginning to display identity along similar lines, which “makes all men and women key players in the story of the fall of the Western Empire” (Ibid. 30-4).

⁶⁶ Halsall, “Gender and the End of Empire” 22. See also K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge, 2008) and “Insinuations of womanly influence: an aspect of the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy”, *JRS* 82 (1992) 150-164.

Just as archaeological findings repay cautious treatment, the images of women that we find in the literature of the late antique / early mediaeval period deserve to be read with rather more care than has been customary. Leslie Brubaker, writing about the *Secret History* of Prokopios from c.550, finds that while historians have hurried to ameliorate its excoriating picture of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527-565), the correspondingly scandalous image of his wife, the Empress Theodora, has barely been challenged. Brubaker argues that the portrayals are intended to complement each other, the wickedness and depravity of his wife supplying ample proof of Justinian's poor judgment.⁶⁷ Chapter four of the present thesis will highlight a similar device at work in Gregory's image of the royal couple Chilperic (561-584) and Fredegund († 597), which has not been remarked on previously. Of course, the device could work in the other direction: a wife who was morally upstanding reflected well upon her husband, and his attention to her good counsel was testament to his judgment. This, as Chapter two of this thesis will show, must be considered when evaluating the textual image of Clothild, wife of Clovis.

Uncovering a system of gender relations in a given society gives the opportunity to uncover the inferences about the sexes that facilitate the view of women as being "good to think with."⁶⁸ For example, Gregory of Nyssa appropriated a woman's voice – that of his sister, Macrina – to examine some of the theological problems of his day.

⁶⁷ L. Brubaker, "Sex, lies and textuality: the *Secret History* of Prokopios and the rhetoric of gender in sixth-century Byzantium", in *GEMW* 83-101.

⁶⁸ P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988) 153, drawing on C. Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (London, 1968) 496. Levi-Strauss cautioned against the reduction of women to the status of symbols, as "words do not speak, while women do", and thus are themselves producers of signs (*Structural Anthropology*, (Harmondsworth, 1977) 61).

Gregory undoubtedly wished to exalt his sister, but also to use the virtue and knowledge he projected onto a mere woman to shame men whose fervour burned less brightly and whose theological knowledge was not so rigorous.⁶⁹ In his “The Lady Appears: Materializations of ‘Woman’ in Early Monastic Literature,”⁷⁰ David Brakke discusses the trope of the female transvestite. This woman, who may have been living in disguise in the monastery for years, reveals her true self at a moment of crisis, such when the unthinkable happens and her luminous piety leads to calls for her to be made abbot. One such woman, St. Papula, is referred to by Gregory in his *Glory of the Confessors*.⁷¹ Brakke suggests that this usage is in line with the common deployment of pious women to shame men who ought to be able to do better.⁷² While drawing on certain cultural assumptions, that a woman was weaker, and a man ought to exhibit greater mental and bodily strength, this text can also be seen as reinforcing and thus helping to create these assumptions. Such devices can also be found in a secular setting. In *DLH IX.9* one Duke Amalo is prevented from raping a young virgin by the young woman’s own valiant defence of her virtue. Recalling the Apocryphal heroine Judith, the girl takes up Amalo’s own sword and runs him through with it. Just as the story of Judith functioned as a reproach to those men who would not – or could not – show similar courage in defence of their people and faith,⁷³ the young woman shames those who should show better self-control: men.⁷⁴ This

⁶⁹ E. Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the “Linguistic Turn””, *CH* 67 (1998) 29.

⁷⁰ *JMEMH* 33.3 (Fall 2003) 387-402.

⁷¹ *GC* 16, ed. and trans. R. Van Dam (Liverpool, 1988) 13-14.

⁷² Brakke, “The Lady Appears” 392.

⁷³ Judith, a charming and beautiful Jewish widow, became disgusted with her countrymen, who did not trust God to deliver them from their Assyrian conquerors. Taking matters into her own hands, she visited the enemy camp, gradually finding favour with the general, Holofernes. One night, granted access to his tent, she decapitated him while he lay drunk (Book of Judith, Old Testament Apocrypha).

is confirmed by the words of Amalo himself. With his dying breaths, he affirms the girl's virtue and confesses his own wicked intentions. The girl herself is not given a voice: she is powerless before the law and needs Amalo to speak up for her innocence. Thus the text, by briefly overturning gender expectations, ends by affirming them.⁷⁵

The relationship between the sexes can function as a given against which other assertions can be made, lending it a metaphoric power through which ideas about society and power can be expressed. Lucy Pick finds female characters being used in this way in early Spanish chronicles. In these chronicles, a particular concern is with the acquisition, maintenance and loss of power through conquest or alliance. Pick finds female characters appearing in these contexts as war booty, as marriage partners or as sources of discord at the beginning of a power struggle.⁷⁶ The conquered "booty-bride" stands for her conquered people, and Spain is itself personified by Isidore of Seville as "prized feminine booty", over whom many have fought and whom many more have desired.⁷⁷ Gregory uses an intriguing variant on this device in his story of King Theudebert's conquering of the town of Cabrières in 533.⁷⁸ The welcome of Deuteria, who invites the Frankish king

⁷⁴ She also demonstrates the power of God. Such was his omnipotence that he could defeat the enemies of Israel through a mere woman (M. Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior. Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven, 1998) 10.

⁷⁵ This episode recalls the story of Susannah and the elders. (Daniel 13). The elders, men of high standing in the community, had watched Susannah bathe, then accused her of adultery when she refused their proposition. She is vocal in her protests, but legally her voice counts for little. It takes the intervention of Daniel to ensure her safety. As Gail Corrington Streeter highlights, "[m]en accuse, men judge, wise men deliver" (*The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* (Kentucky, 1997) 117-8.

⁷⁶ "Gender in the early Spanish Chronicles: from John of Biclár to Pelayo of Oviedo", *La Corónica* 32:3 (Summer 2004) 227-48.

⁷⁷ Pick, "Gender in the early Spanish Chronicles" 229-32.

⁷⁸ *DLH* III.22.

first into the town and then into her bed, is analogous to the eagerness of the town to be conquered and to accept Frankish rule.⁷⁹

However, gender expectations are malleable, and change over time, and the relationship between text and gender assumption is not one-sided. Rather than simply describing a dominant discourse on gender, a text can be interpreted as defending, even helping to create, such a discourse. As shown above, the description of a woman who valiantly defends her chastity or faith, showing courage and physical strength not perceived as usual in her sex, can act as a device to remind men of their proper place *vis-à-vis* women. The exchange of ideals is also found in law codes and charters. It was until recently assumed that law codes governed behaviour; this has been challenged, and the ideological function of these codes stressed. Thus, rather than presenting the ‘reality’ of relations between the sexes, the codes instead present an ideal.⁸⁰ In his discussion of Lombard law codes, Ross Balzaretti suggests that the lawmakers, in creating new laws to deal with the anomaly of female violence against men, took the opportunity to make a forceful statement about gender relations, decreeing harsh punishments for the perpetrators, as “these are things that men do, not women.”⁸¹ In his discussion of Arians, Gregory placed the heretics beyond the pale not only religiously but culturally, painting a picture of a religious community in which women were allowed to run riot, with dire

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis, 114-6.

⁸⁰ Nelson, “Family, Gender and Sexuality” 154.

⁸¹ R. Balzaretti, “‘These are things that men do, not women’: the social regulation of female violence in Lombard Italy”, in G. Halsall ed., *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 1998) 186-9.

consequences. Chapter three of this thesis will show that Gregory presented Arian women as aggressive, immoral and resistant to authority, thereby highlighting a contrast to Christian ideals. In so doing, he not only condemned the heretics but also reinforced the desirability of female obedience and submission. Gender can in fact be seen to be vital to many of Gregory's moral lessons.

As suggested above, gender can also be used to express ideas about foreignness. Arian women's forcefulness highlights their "Otherness", as well as undermining the masculinity of the men who should be controlling them. Walter Pohl has studied the way in which writers of the later Roman Empire accommodated incredible reports of fighting women within barbarian tribes by reviving the myth of the Amazon.⁸² In a study of the *Chanson de Roland*, Sharon Kinoshita highlights the Saracen queen Bramimonde's verbal aggression as a marker of her foreignness. She is far from the silent, passive ideal of Frankish womanhood.⁸³ The deployment of this figure, Kinoshita suggests, helped to manage concerns about the instability of the relationship between pagan and Christian.⁸⁴

Gender approaches lend a new texture to studies of a wide variety of historical texts. Gender assumptions play a vital and often interactive role in many sources, and can be used to articulate a number of other concerns. Spotlighting and unpicking rather than simply accepting such assumptions can therefore be of use in reaching a more nuanced

⁸² W. Pohl, "Gender and ethnicity in the early Middle Ages", in *GEMW* 23-43.

⁸³ S. Kinoshita, "'Pagans are Wrong and Christians are Right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*", *JMEMS* 31:1 (Winter 2001) 95.

⁸⁴ "If the possibility of conversion is held open, then any sense of identity which depends on the opposition between self and other is intrinsically unstable" (Kinoshita, "Pagans" 86).

understanding of a writer's purpose and meaning. As the vast majority of early mediaeval texts were written by churchmen, it is germane to turn now to the narrative roles played by female figures in the Bible, and the gender assumptions that lie behind these.

Feminist Biblical scholarship

As noted above, despite the general acceptance among scholars of the *DLH* that Gregory's writing was influenced in various ways by the Bible, the women of the *DLH* have not been studied with this in mind. The way in which gender and linguistic approaches in conjunction have been applied to the Bible is deserving of special consideration. Feminist Biblical scholarship is of great use here. The last third of the twentieth century saw a surge of interest in the women of the Bible. Particularly inviting to scholarly attention were the tales of abuse of women found in the Old Testament. In 1984 Phyllis Trible addressed these concerns in her *Texts of Terror*, which acted as a springboard for increasingly critical exegetes who used stories of the maltreatment of women to support their stance that Christianity is patriarchal, with nothing to say to women.⁸⁵ Since the publication of Trible's work, more nuanced interpretations have appeared, seeking to explain, rather than simply condemn, the use of women in these texts. Gale A. Yee has discussed the description, in the book of Hosea, of the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage. The apostate nation of Israel is personified as an adulterous wife who has failed to adhere to the terms of her covenant with her husband, and is punished accordingly. However, Yee makes it clear that some consideration should

⁸⁵ P. Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, 1984). Of the studies which take a harsher view of Christianity, notable are M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: the Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, 1988), and D. Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford, 1990).

be given to social context.⁸⁶ Eryl Wynn Davies, a non-feminist Biblical scholar who has nevertheless found feminist approaches helpful, also focuses on the literary representation of women in the Bible. He finds that an array of gender assumptions underpinning the symbolic use of female characters: for example, the perception that women are weaker and in need of protection allowed for the depiction of Jerusalem as “a helpless female in need of male rescue”.⁸⁷ He, like Yee, draws attention to the likening by various prophets of the apostate nation of Israel to a faithless wife.⁸⁸ Here, it is assumed the reader understands that female sexuality is apt to run rampant if not subjected to firm control. Both of these ideas – Jerusalem as a physically weak woman and Israel as promiscuous - readily identify woman-as-nation.⁸⁹ Thus, alliances with foreign powers of whom the prophet disapproves, or interest shown in alternative religions, are readily depicted as adultery, while conquest can be styled as rape.

Even in instances in which female characters are apparently rounded and not simply symbols, their purpose is often essentially to highlight aspects of the male

⁸⁶ G. A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 2003). There is a large corpus of recent work on feminist approaches to the Bible. For other aspects of the literary use of women in the Old Testament in particular, see for example A. Bach, *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge, 1997); E. W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Aldershot, 2003); L. Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16”, *Biblical Interpretation: a journal of contemporary approaches* vol.8, no.3 (2000) 231-254; S. Niditch, “War, Women and Defilement in Numbers 31”, in C. Camp and C. Fontaine eds., *Women, War and Metaphor: Language and Society in the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, *Semeia* 61 (1993) 39-57; Streete, *The Strange Woman*. Some of these are more balanced than others. For further bibliography, and a rather different approach, see J. L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford, 2001). Here, Thompson looks at the way the texts have been interpreted by Christian commentators down through the centuries to the Reformation, exposing the way in which some of these commentators struggled profoundly with the apparent cruelty meted out to women.

⁸⁷ Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ See also R. W. Connell, “The State, Gender and Sexual politics: theory and appraisal”, *Theory and Society* 19/v (Oct 1990) 507-544.

protagonist's relationship with his God. Job's wife, who urged him to "curse God and die", acts as a foil to allow Job to demonstrate his greater faith,⁹⁰ while Abigail, in her warning to David not to seek revenge on her husband, but to trust that God will punish as appropriate, is reminding the King of his part in God's greater plan. One author has commented that there cannot be said to be any "real" women in the Bible at all.⁹¹

Throughout the Bible, women tend to fall into a dichotomy, as paragons of virtue or wicked harlots. These pairs of women often represent choices for men, between an arduous but worthy path of righteousness, or the easy way of luxury and sin. The Book of Revelation, for example, presents a choice between two cities, each personified by a woman and representing a life choice: life within the Church, with the prospect of salvation, or life as part of the wider, sinful world and the resultant path to damnation.

How can the insights of feminist biblical scholarship be applied to the study of the *DLH*? Clearly, the ideas above are of value not only for the study of the Bible, but for any work which takes the Bible as an inspiration, and which might be reasonably expected to share some of its gender assumptions. One example of such shared assumptions should suffice to highlight the relevance of such an approach to the *DLH*. In *DLH* V.32, we learn of a woman in Paris who had left her husband, and was accused of living with another man. The husband's kin visited the woman's relatives, saying:

⁹⁰ Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 9.

⁹¹ See chapter 2 of the current thesis, 51.

*‘Aut idoneam redde filiam tuam, aut certe moriatur, ne stuprum hoc generi
nostro notam infligat.’⁹²*

This episode is reminiscent of the rape of Dinah, in which the sexual assault of a woman is a matter of honour between her brothers and the kin of Shechem, her abuser.⁹³ Both texts assume that the woman’s sexuality is governed by her menfolk, and that her dishonour, either willing or not, is a crime against the person who owned this sexuality. Neither woman has any further part to play: the Frankish woman commits suicide, a mere footnote in history, while Dinah, having performed her function as a plot device, simply disappears. In both cases, even though a woman is central to the action, it is not really “about” her at all.

Concern might be expressed that a concentration on the study of women’s symbolic value risks losing the “real”, historical woman altogether. That this was one of the challenges posed to gender studies by the “linguistic turn” was noted by Elizabeth Clark, in her essay “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’”. As shown above, Gregory of Nyssa, in turning his sister into a symbol, causes the historical Macrina to effectively vanish. Were women, Clark asked, losing their place in history just as they had apparently gained it?⁹⁴ However, while women might be useful as a literary tool to allow men to “think” their culture, they are also active agents of that culture’s transmission. Janet Nelson suggests that, as nurturers and moral guides at court, “women could play a central part in the representation and

⁹² *DLH* V.32, *MGH SSRM* I.1 (Hanover, 1937) 237.3-4. “‘Either prove your daughter blameless, or resolve to let her die, so that this adultery shall not bring disgrace on our family’”.

⁹³ Genesis 34.

⁹⁴ Clark, “‘The Lady Vanishes’” 3.

transmission of courtly rules and values – hence, in the construction of the very idea of the court society.”⁹⁵ Women writers also contributed to the creation of the gender norms of their own societies. Dhuoda, in writing her book of instruction for her son William, did not intend for him to be its only reader: her plan was that he would show it to other young men at court, who would also be influenced by it.⁹⁶ She thus helped to affirm norms of masculinity at the Carolingian court. The tone of her writing also suggests that women were far from passive recipients of behavioural norms imposed upon them.⁹⁷ Through connections with the family, women provided a link with the past and actively transmitted that past, helping in the process to shape it.⁹⁸ Women could also, of course, interact with images. Biblically-literate queens might be inspired in their conduct by the example of Old Testament exemplars,⁹⁹ or themselves become paragons to inspire later generations of princesses as they set off across borders or overseas to marry pagan or heretical kings.¹⁰⁰ The queen, later monastic foundress, and eventually saint Radegund was complicit in the creation of her own image by various authors,¹⁰¹ and was surely cognisant of the influence that this image would have on later generations of nuns.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ J. Nelson, “Gendering courts in the early medieval west” in *GEMW* 195.

⁹⁶ Nelson, “Gendering courts”, and “Dhuoda”.

⁹⁷ Dhuoda in fact emphasises her position as a mother in order to underline her right to offer advice. (Nelson, “Dhuoda” 109-111).

⁹⁸ Women’s contribution to the creation of their past has been examined by E. van Houts in her *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900-1200* (Cambridge, 1999).

⁹⁹ See for example L. L. Huneycutt, “Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: the Esther Topos” J. Carpenter and S-B Maclean eds., *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Urbana and Chicago, 1995) 126-146.

¹⁰⁰ As was the case with Clothild. See Nelson, “Queens as Converters” 99-101.

¹⁰¹ See J. M. H. Smith, “Radegundis peccatrix: Authorisations of Virginity in Late Antique Gaul” in P. Rousseau and E. Papoutsakis eds., *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown* (Ashgate, 2009) 303-326.

¹⁰² And not just nuns. Queen Balhild (†680) named her daughter Radegund, in honour of the saint.

That women may indeed “disappear” is not a concern that need detain us for long. The women of the *DLH* can be shown to be interacting and negotiating with the various images imposed upon them by the gender assumptions of the time.

The beginnings of the *Histories*

In his 2006 translation, edited to provide a political narrative of the years covered by the *DLH*’s span, Alexander Murray argued that any attempt to date individual Books or chapters of the *DLH* is “misplaced”, and dismissed attempts to unravel Gregory’s own changing politics are “fanciful”.¹⁰³ Taking a similar view of the perils of attempting to date individual Books, Adriaan Breukelaar argued that Gregory had begun to collect anecdotes whilst a deacon at Clermont and continued to compile these at Tours, writing them down shortly after he heard about them, only adding the Prefaces and prophetic material as he was approaching the end of his own life. For Breukelaar, the *DLH* as a coherent concept cannot be considered to have existed until this time.¹⁰⁴ Heinzelmann, concerned as he is with a literary evaluation of the *DLH*, does not engage with this particular debate. In contrast, Van Dam does attempt to date the Books, as well as the individual books of *Miracula*,¹⁰⁵ and Wood and Halsall have both contended that it is eminently possible to trace Gregory’s shifting political allegiances.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ A. C. Murray ed. and trans., *Gregory of Tours: the Merovingians* (Peterborough, Ontario, 2006) xix.

¹⁰⁴ Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Power* 51-6.

¹⁰⁵ Although “hesitation is still recommended, because Gregory was constantly revising his writings over the years” (Van Dam, “Introduction” to *GM*, 4).

¹⁰⁶ Ian Wood provides approximate dates in his *Gregory of Tours* (Headstart History Papers, Bangor, 1994) 3, and discusses Gregory’s shifting political allegiances in “The Secret *Histories* of Gregory of Tours.” Uncovering Gregory’s encoded response to political change is also the subject of Halsall’s, “Nero and Herod? The death of Chilperic and Gregory of Tours’ writing of history”, in *WGT* 337-50.

This thesis takes the latter view, and proposes that Gregory began to write the *DLH* in response to the personal and political circumstances surrounding the beginning of his episcopate. These circumstances require some sketching in at this point, although they will be examined in greater detail in chapter four, which deals with the contemporaneous events.

When King Chlothar I died in 561, his lands were divided between his four sons; Charibert, Sigibert, Guntram and Chilperic.¹⁰⁷ The *civitas* of Tours fell to the lot of Charibert, but when this king died in 567, the rulership of Tours was contested.¹⁰⁸ In the summer of 573, the see at Tours fell vacant when the bishop Eufronius died.¹⁰⁹ Sigibert had at this time a tenuous hold over the town, and in choosing Gregory as the new bishop he was choosing a loyal Auvergnat to hold one of the most politically significant positions in this crucial town.¹¹⁰ However, the kingly shoe-in was probably uncanonical, and certainly upset those in the town who felt that theirs was the stronger claim. Not only was Gregory regarded as something of an outsider, he also had to face opposition from those who were loyal to Chilperic.¹¹¹ In addition, Tours had metropolitan authority over several sees which lay in Chilperic's lands.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *DLH* IV.21.

¹⁰⁸ *DLH* IV.45. See L. Pietri, *La ville de Tours du IV^e au VI^e siècle: naissance d'une cite chrétienne* (Rome, 1983) 210-11.

¹⁰⁹ Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 63.

¹¹⁰ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 38-40.

¹¹¹ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 38.

¹¹² Pietri, *La ville de Tours* 265-6; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority* 188-9; and maps in Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 369-370.

Gregory is remarkably quiet about the circumstances surrounding his election in 573. Heinzelmann suggests that this is less to do with sensitivity over the possible uncanonical elements, than because of a wish “that the biographical elements of his work be subordinated to the didactic”.¹¹³ However, such an aim is in no way inconsistent with a desire to leave out the less savoury aspects of his career. It can be demonstrated that Gregory’s didactic purpose was heavily invested in the consolidation of his own political position.¹¹⁴ The uncanonical appointment was inconsistent with the image of himself that he wished to create; this would be true whether or not one believes the *DLH* to be politically motivated.

With the death of Sigibert in 575, Chilperic seized control of Tours.¹¹⁵ Guy Halsall proposed in a recent article that Gregory began writing his *DLH* shortly after Sigibert’s assassination, commencing with the Preface to Book V, the original purpose of which was to serve as a sermon directed at Chilperic’s ambitious son, Merovech (†578).¹¹⁶ In an attempt to consolidate his position, Merovech had married Queen Brunhild, (†613) the widow of Sigibert – Merovech’s own uncle.¹¹⁷ I agree with Halsall as to the identification of Book V’s Preface as the centrepiece, and likeliest starting point, of the *DLH*. However, I differ on the purpose of this piece. With Chilperic’s seizure of Tours, Gregory found himself, early in his career, at ideological loggerheads with a king who appeared to have little respect for the institutions that Gregory held dear. Gregory

¹¹³ *Gregory of Tours* 38.

¹¹⁴ As is also the case with his *VM*, as has been demonstrated by Brown in *Relics and Social Status*.

¹¹⁵ *DLH* V.1.

¹¹⁶ Halsall, “The Preface to Book V” 310-314.

¹¹⁷ *DLH* V.2.

was forced on more than one occasion to defend the status of St. Martin's church as a place of sanctuary.¹¹⁸ The Chilperic of the *DLH* is a king in relentless pursuit of wealth, whose desires were completely at odds with Gregory's own prioritizing of spiritual riches. It was this clash of ideals, I suggest, which prompted the writing of the *DLH*, and it is to Chilperic, rather than to Merovech, that the Preface to Book V is addressed.¹¹⁹ As will be demonstrated in chapter four, Fredegund's speech at V.34, rather than merely echoing and amplifying Gregory's statements in the Preface, as both Halsall and Heinzelmann have suggested,¹²⁰ is specifically designed to highlight Gregory's prescience, and to confirm that his prophesy has come true.

The first four Books of the *DLH* are written with the challenges of the period immediately after Sigibert's death in mind. They establish the connection between Merovingian success and respect for St. Martin – something Chilperic must learn to appreciate – as well as demonstrating the need for kings to turn their aggression outwards. This matter was vital to Gregory, as Tours, a heavily contested town, suffered terribly in civil wars as the people struggled to avoid falling foul of any of the kings between whom the town's lordship passed.¹²¹ Similarly, earlier Books of the *DLH* illustrate the fate of those who had fallen into heresy; something that Gregory may have feared for Chilperic.¹²² He certainly believed that Chilperic was far too devoted to

¹¹⁸ *DLH* V.4, 14.

¹¹⁹ I agree here with Heinzelmann (*Gregory of Tours* 42-3).

¹²⁰ Halsall, "The Preface to Book V" 303-4; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 42-4, 46, 50. Heinzelmann identifies the similarity between Fredegund's speech and the Preface to Book V as evidence that the Preface was directed at Chilperic, but does not analyse the speech further.

¹²¹ Pietri, *La ville de Tours* 265-274.

¹²² *DLH* III.Pref., III.31. Cf. Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 86-7.

material wealth, to the detriment of his spiritual well-being, and the dangers of various kinds of avarice are also illustrated in these earlier Books.¹²³ All of these concerns find mention at some point in Book V. This Book is about Gregory's gathering strength in relation to the current king of Tours. However, a change occurs around the much-disputed trial at Berny-Rivière, at which Gregory was accused of slandering the queen, by spreading a rumour that she had had an extra-marital affair.¹²⁴ Here, Gregory was made aware, not so much of the possible dangers of crossing the king, but of the depth to which feeling at Tours still ran against him. The authors of the plot included a priest named Riculf, who seems to have been chief among those disappointed in his own ambitions by Gregory's appointment as bishop.¹²⁵

Gregory's record of Berny-Rivière is a rather more downbeat affair than that of the trial of Praetextatus earlier in Book V, with its dramatic set-speeches.¹²⁶ From this point onwards, Gregory's writing is a little more circumspect. He appears to have realized that his writings could cause difficulties for him if they were ever to fall into the

¹²³ (For wealth) III.10, IV.12; (for food and drink) III.36, IV.12, 46. Chapter five of the current thesis contains numerous references to Gregory's examples illustrating the incompatibility of greed and spirituality (193, and n.69).

¹²⁴ *DLH* V.49.

¹²⁵ Bishoprics were highly sought after. "The means of appointment were sufficiently various, and the prize so valuable, that the disappointed parties might continue to fight on even after their rivals had been appointed" (P. Fouracre, "Why were so many bishops killed in Merovingian Francia?" in N. Fryde and D. Reitz eds., *Bischofsmord in Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 2003) 24. Examining the narratives of the murders of Aunemund, Praejectus and Leudegar, Fouracre finds envy among the local clergy to a major factor. A particular source of resentment was conflict between those who saw themselves as working their way up through the ranks, and those who had "the prestige, the power, the contacts, or even the spiritual qualities, which allowed them to jump the queue." (Ibid.) For a gendered interpretation of the poetry presented by Venantius Fortunatus at the Berny-Rivière trial, see J. M. H. Smith, "'Carrying the cares of state': gender perspectives on early medieval Staatlichkeit", in W. Pohl and V. Wieser eds., *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat—europäische Perspektiven* (Vienna, 2009) 233-4.

¹²⁶ *DLH* V.18. See Chapter four of this thesis, 142-6, for a closer analysis of this episode.

wrong hands.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, Ian Wood believes that it is possible, through careful examination of his literary technique, to expose the difficulties under which Gregory was writing,¹²⁸ indicating that there are moments when Gregory seems positively to invite his reader to ‘unwrite’ what he has written in order to expose what he dared not write about openly.¹²⁹ This approach has more recently been revisited by Guy Halsall, who has suggested that, far from being Gregory’s ideal king, Guntram was the ruler under whom Gregory was most constrained and most uncomfortable.¹³⁰ Halsall’s theory is that the bilious character assassination of King Chilperic in *DLH* VI.46 was in fact Gregory’s attempt to distance himself from a Neustrian-Austrasian alliance that, in the wake of Chilperic’s death in 584, had become positively dangerous.¹³¹

I agree in part with Halsall’s assessment of Gregory’s relationships with Chilperic and Guntram, but I suggest that the difficulty with Guntram was a literary as well as a political and personal one. Gregory rather loses sight of his didactic purpose, and of his image of himself as bishop-prophet, in the Books of the *DLH* which cover the years immediately after Chilperic’s death in 584. Guntram, who fought with Sigibert’s heir Childebert II over the rulership of Tours until the city was officially ceded to Childebert with the Treaty of Andelot in 587, was a more complex character than Chilperic had been. Not only did the various elements of his personality – piety, paranoia, vengefulness

¹²⁷ Wood, “The Secret *Histoires*” 270.

¹²⁸ Wood, “The Secret *Histoires*” 270.

¹²⁹ Wood, “The Secret *Histoires*” 270.

¹³⁰ Halsall, “Nero and Herod?”. Halsall also refutes the idea that Berny-Rivière presented a threat to Gregory, arguing that the account of the trial was merely intended to illustrate the character of Leudast, who had been Gregory’s *bête noire* for a number of years (Ibid. 340-341, 349-350).

¹³¹ Halsall, “Nero and Herod?” 344-347.

– make him rather harder to handle in real life than Chilperic had been, but they also made him a difficult, and possibly less satisfying, character to write into a black-and-white schema. Books VII and VIII of the *Histories* find Gregory treading a careful path through political allegiances. He once again found a secure moral centre of gravity with the apocalyptic flavour of the last two Books, in which he was apparently able to refocus his sense of Christian leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the current state of research into Gregory of Tours' work, making clear that gender, until now absent from any approach to Gregory's writing, has the potential to be a vital analytic tool. That such a study is particularly timely is further suggested by the work of feminist Biblical scholars, who have uncovered the Bible's gender assumptions. Specific examples were given in this chapter of the ways in which the methods utilized by such scholars might be applied to the *DLH*. The use of gender as a lens has repercussions for some of the liveliest debates in Gregory studies; for example, as was shown above, the conception and order of composition of the *DLH*. The next chapter focuses on Gregory's portrayal of Queen Clothild, and offers a fresh perspective on another area of intense interest: the conversion of Clovis.

Chapter 2

Clothild: the Mother of Gregory's Merovingians

Introduction

The tension between Gregory's expectations of the Merovingian kings of Gaul and the reality of their rulership lends the *DLH* much of its life and historical value. Nonetheless, however dissatisfied Gregory may have been with individual kings, queens, princes and princesses, he never doubted that the Merovingians were the rightful rulers of Gaul. They were the chosen stewards of the latest incarnation of God's Kingdom on earth, and as such were subject to the authority of God alone, as was true of their Hebrew antecedents. The various component parts of their legitimacy fall into place over the course of Book II of the *DLH*, where Gallic history is tied to Biblical. The leaders of the people that will later become known as the Franks are chosen because they are the most warlike, but they continue to succeed because they find God's favour through becoming Christians.

This chapter will examine for the first time the role that women play in establishing these elements, especially in identifying and justifying a particular Merovingian as rightful ruler. It focuses on two women: Basina, whose words single out Childeric as the most warlike of kings, and therefore the most suitable leader, and in rather more detail Clothild († 544), to whom the *DLH* ascribes a major role in the conversion of Clovis to Catholic Christianity. Clothild has perhaps already received disproportionate attention for this role in "converting" her husband, and has been central

to some feminist arguments about the importance of women in Western Europe's conversion narrative, but other aspects of her role have received far less attention. This chapter will examine the Biblical styling of her character, as well as arguing that her words to her husband, encouraging him to abandon his useless pagan Gods in favour of Christ, deflect attention from unsavoury claims that the father of Christian Gaul had dallied with Arianism before accepting Catholicism,¹ and also from the possibility that his conversion may have been a shrewd political decision.²

The first four Books of the *DLH* establish a theme central to the purpose of the work as a whole: a depiction of the co-existence of and battle between the spiritual and the worldly, between good and evil,³ and it is here that another element of the Merovingians' legitimacy is revealed. A great king had to be able to identify good counsel, to filter from all the advice he received from his many would-be counsellors nuggets of truth and good advice. This was particularly true when the words come from his consort, who had his private ear, and might have an array of underhand means of persuasion at her disposal.⁴ The king's ability to differentiate between sound and poor advice reveals much about his strength of character. The portrayals of women are thus

¹ See I. Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis", *RBPH*, 63 (1985) 268-70, and repr. in L. Little and B. Rosenwein eds., *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford and Malden, 1998) 86-88. See also D. Shanzer, "Dating the baptism of Clovis". For a brief outline of the debate, see Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis" 249.

² I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms. 450-751* (Harlow, 1994) 48-9.

³ Thus in the *DLH* there are "those who behaved with a Christian social morality, and those who did not" (Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 102-3).

⁴ Such as sexual wiles. It should be remembered that after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, bishops had also begun to fill a privileged role as counsellors of the king. Self-interest must be taken into account when evaluating their descriptions of queens, who in some cases were their rivals for the king's ear. For the weight given to women's counsel as a double-edged sword for the status of women, see J. Nelson, "Queens as Converters of King in the Earlier Middle Ages" in C. la Rocca ed., *Agire da Donna: Modelli e Pratiche di Rappresentazione (Secoli VI-X)* (Padova, 2005) 95-107.

essential to the reader's perception of their male relatives and companions. This is a theme which will run throughout the *DLH*, and to which women will remain of vital importance as a narrative device. Here, the Bible has been highly influential to Gregory's work. Women's power, as it is depicted in the *DLH*, has already received some illuminating attention,⁵ but the role of women as a lens through which to view the characters and evaluate the decisions of their menfolk has thus far received very little scrutiny. The current chapter begins the process of redressing the balance, in part through its concluding analysis of a highly revealing triptych in which women's counsel, and the ability of men to evaluate it, is held up to scrutiny. It will be demonstrated that, in encouraging her sons to take vengeance, Clothild sought to uncover which of them was the most warlike, and therefore the most worthy of carrying on his father's legacy. Clothild emerges from this chapter as playing a crucial discursive role in the construction of Merovingian kingship.

Essential, now, to the study of the *DLH* is a grasp of Gregory's careful tailoring of events past and contemporary to suit his own ends. What these ends might be has been the subject of much contention. The final component of the Merovingians' legitimacy was one that Gregory believed they shared with himself. St Martin was the father of Catholicism in Gaul, and his profile as wonder-worker and the most famous incumbent of the see of Tours was irrevocably tied to Gregory's own success as the current bishop. Books II, III and IV of the *DLH* contain his efforts to illustrate that Martin was also the

⁵ See for example S. F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Pennsylvania, 1981), and focusing on women and power in the religious sphere, J. T. Nichols and L.T. Shank eds., *Medieval Religious Women* vol. 2, *Peaceweavers* (Milan, 1987) and J. T. Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society* (Chicago, 1998) 180-187.

spiritual father of the Merovingian dynasty, and that the success of the kings was intimately associated with their respect for the saint.⁶ The implication was of course that their success was also dependant on their respect for Gregory himself, as the current bishop and thus Martin's representative on earth. Once again, the character of Clothild is vital. Clothild's dedication to the tomb of St. Martin supports Gregory's claims for an inextricable link between respect of the saint and the success of the Merovingian dynasty. It will become clear that studying the women of these early chapters, and Clothild in particular, lends a new clarity to a reading of the *DLH*. She is no less the mother of the Merovingians than Clovis is their father. It will, however, become apparent that there is a tension between ideal and reality in the *DLH*'s portrayal of the Queen, as there is in that of the king.

Choosing the king

Books II, III and IV of the *DLH* find Gregory presenting Gaul as the new Kingdom of God on earth.⁷ These Books carry a strong Old Testament flavour which is found less consistently in the Books contemporaneous with Gregory's own life. Clearly, the events of the distant past are far more malleable, and as such can be framed as required. Women play a crucial role in the creation of this effect.

⁶ See for example *DLH* II.37, III.28, IV.2.

⁷ "Because of the mission of St. Martin, the challenge of the kingdom had been thrust upon the inhabitants of Gaul; after 5500 years the promise of Eden had been brought to Tours" (Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 66, and c.f. Wynn, "Wars and Warriors" 16).

Before turning to Basina, whose words to her prospective husband, Childeric, have a prophetic ring, we must explore the biblical discourses on which Gregory drew.⁸ The stylisation of Basina and Childeric's coming together owes something to the meeting of Abigail and David in I Samuel 25.23-35.⁹ Direct speech, especially in the Old Testament, should always be regarded as important,¹⁰ and women's words are perhaps particularly so. Before she begins to speak, Abigail enjoins David to listen to what she has to say, thus alerting the king – and the reader – to the importance of her words:

‘..my lord: let thy handmaid speak, I beseech thee, in thy ears, and hear the words of thy servant.’¹¹

After hearing what Abigail has to say, David acknowledges the impact that these words have made:

‘Go in peace into thy house, behold I have heard thy voice, and honoured thy face.’¹²

Gail Yee suggests that this vitality of women's words stems from the fact that there are no “real” women in the Bible as a whole; only symbols and representations.¹³ This one-dimensional quality makes them ideal vehicles for a host of other ideas: they

⁸ This account is legendary, and not of Gregory's creating; however, its inclusion suggests that it is consistent with his own literary plan.

⁹ Cf. Wynn, “Wars and Warriors” 32. Wynn does not, however, examine the role that Basina plays, beyond drawing this initial parallel.

¹⁰ “In any given narrative event, and especially, at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory” (R. Atler, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (London, 1981) 74).

¹¹ I Sam 25.24. English Bible quotations are from the Douay-Rheims version.

¹² I Sam 25.35.

¹³ She asserts that women in the Bible were merely “ideological constructs that masked specific historical and socioeconomic subtexts” rather than as real people (*Poor Banished Children of Eve* 159).

can be channels for the wisdom of God,¹⁴ or for the seductive words of the Devil. Men are the Old Testament's protagonists, the fully rounded characters whose various relationships with their God form the main narrative strands of the Bible's historical books. Women often function primarily as representations of aspects of men's internal struggle. Thus Eve, who was created to fulfil Adam's need for companionship rather than as an autonomous person in her own right, channels the persuasive words of Satan to tempt Adam. This sets the course for the Fall, and for all of humankind's subsequent fraught history of estrangement from God, necessitating Christ's sacrifice in the fullness of time.¹⁵

The words of Abigail might thus be interpreted as the workings of David's conscience, or the voice of God, warning the king not to seek vengeance on a man who had insulted him as he had planned to do, but to trust in God to mete out the appropriate punishment to Nabal, and to seize victory on David's behalf. Her words remind David of, and alert the reader to, the part that David is to play in God's plan, and the necessity of maintaining a character consistent with this.¹⁶ David acknowledges the impact that her

¹⁴ See E. A. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the 'Linguistic Turn'", *J ECS* (Fall 1998) 426.

¹⁵ The wives of the patriarchs are also crucial, primarily because of the influences they are depicted as exerting over their husbands. Abraham is instructed to listen to the words of his wife, Sarah, when she suggests that Hagar, together with her son, be put out of the household. The casting out of Ishmael and his mother made Isaac Abraham's sole heir, and purified the subsequent line (Genesis 21.12-13).

¹⁶ 'And when the Lord shall have done to thee, my lord, all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have made thee prince over Israel, this shall not be an occasion of grief to thee, and a scruple of heart to my lord, that thou hast shed innocent blood, or hast revenged thyself: and when the Lord shall have done well by my lord, thou shalt remember thy handmaid' (I Sam 25.30-31).

words have had.¹⁷ The ultimate expression of David's victory over the other man is the claiming of his prize: Nabal's wife, Abigail, herself.¹⁸

Gregory was of course strongly influenced by the Bible structurally, thematically and in the creation of character. The women of the *DLH* clearly resist such a one-dimensional interpretation: this is particularly true of those he knew personally. However, his female characters are not as well-rounded as the male characters, thus they can to some extent carry other ideas. In the *DLH*, women's words are frequently seen as vital,¹⁹ and this is certainly true of Basina's words to her prospective husband.

Looking more closely at the context of the queen's appearance, the first half of Book II contains Gregory's attempts to unravel the history of the kings of the Franks. Childeric first appears at *DLH* II.9, his earlier appearances suggesting that he is a rather unworthy sire for Clovis, the great father of the Christian Merovingian dynasty.²⁰ However, Régine Le Jan compares Childeric's return from Thuringian exile to an

¹⁷ 'And David said to Abigail: Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy speech: And blessed be thou, who hast kept me to day from coming to blood, and revenging me with my own hand. Otherwise, as the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, who hath withholden me from doing thee any evil, if thou hadst not quickly come to meet me, there had not been left to Nabal by the morning light, any that pisseth against the wall' (I Sam 25. 32-34).

¹⁸ I Sam 25.42.

¹⁹ The potency of women's words was in evidence in the course of his own life: his mother, Armentaria, counselled her son at one or two critical junctures. She appeared in a vision before him encouraging him to write in spite of his belief that his rustic style was inadequate. She assured him that it was this very style that would make his writing accessible (*VM* Book I pref., in B. Krusch ed, *MGH SSRM* I.2 586.1-7, and Eng. trans. Van Dam, in Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 200). Gregory may be making use of the literary image of the persuasive woman here, but we know that Gregory was close to his mother (see for example *VM* III.10, *MGH SSRM* I.2 635.8-17, and Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 264, in which his mother was cured of pains by St. Martin at Tours shortly after Gregory became bishop, which affirmed that Gregory had Martin's approval in his new role). Perhaps, then, her influence should not be discounted too readily.

²⁰ His debauched lifestyle is described in *DLH* II.12.

initiation ordeal. It is an out-of-the-ordinary exploit, which marks him out as exceptional, and thus indicates the beginning of the family line which will peak in the person of his son.²¹ Le Jan does not highlight Basina's part in this, yet it is vital to Childeric's image as presented here. She appears as an agent of Providence, leaving her husband, King Bisinus of Thuringia, and coming to Childeric to offer herself to him. When Childeric asks why, she replies that he is the most warlike man she is aware of:

*'Novi', inquit, 'utilitatem tuam, quod sis valde strinuus, ideoque veni, ut habitem tecum. Nam noveris, si in transmarinis partibus aliquem cognovissem utiliore tibi, expetissem utique cohabitationem eius.'*²²

There appears to be an implicit threat here: should Basina hear of anyone else whose reputation trounces Childeric's, she will have no hesitation in taking off. This challenges him to maintain this warlike reputation. Like the words of Abigail to David, Basina's speech calls Childeric to an awareness of a higher purpose: in this case, the quality he must maintain if he is to be a successful king of the Franks.

Gregory had already presented evidence which suggested that the Franks chose their leaders on the basis of military prowess,²³ so here, Childeric is identified, through a

²¹ R. Le Jan, "La sacralité de la royauté mérovingienne", in *Annales*, HSS, novembre-décembre 2003, no. 6, 1236. Philip Wynn compares the story of the exile, with the friend who promises to keep him informed, to that of David and Jonathan (I Sam 18-20). The most famous homeward journey was perhaps that depicted in Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus, as a divinely-favoured trickster, perhaps has more in common with Clovis. Wynn suggests that Clovis, like Odysseus, could be described as a man of *metis*; one who lies in wait in order to strike his enemy at the right time (Wynn, "Wars and Warriors" 27).

²² *DLH* II.12, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 62.7-10. "I know" she said "your capability, that you are very vigorous, and I have therefore come to live with you. Be sure that, had I learned of one, even in some region beyond the sea, who was more capable, I would of course have gone to live with him."

²³ *Thoringiam transmeasse, ibique iuxta pagus vel civitates regis crinitos super se creavisse de prima et, ut ita dicam, nobiliore suorum familia. Quod postea probatum Chlodovechi victuriae tradedirunt, itaque in sequenti digerimus* (*DLH* II.9, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 57.12-15). "They crossed Thuringia, and there according to the districts or cities set over them long-haired kings from the first and, so to speak, noblest of their

woman's words, as a suitable father to the man who will go on to bring the whole of Gaul under his own rule. The union between Basina and Childeric is thus a crucial part of the claim for Childeric's legitimacy.

This is not the only way in which Basina cements Childeric's legitimacy. *Strenuus* can also relate to sexual vigour. The pages of the *DLH* make clear that virility played a major role in Merovingian kingship.²⁴ The king's own fertility held a huge symbolic significance, as well as being a practical necessity in founding a dynasty. Basina also assures us that Childeric is suitable in this regard. For Gregory, however, it is vital that this virility is suitably channelled. Before his union with Basina, Childeric is described as immoral, dishonouring the daughters of his subjects.²⁵ We hear no more of this behaviour after his union with Basina. He becomes a suitable father for the great Clovis with Basina's words. We are left with the impression that Childeric turned away from such appetites when he attracted the love of a good wife, an idea that prefigures Clothild's role in uncovering the man her husband could be.

Basina thus helps to create the mythology that will surround the person of the Merovingian kings: they will be warlike and virile. Clothild, as we shall see later, also played her part in inscribing this image on her sons, leading to some incidents which

families. This nobility was afterwards proved by the victories of Clovis, as I shall set out later." Success in war and nobility are interchangeable, and both are clearly vital to the overall persona of the king.

²⁴ I. Wood "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family", in R. Corradini, M. Diesenberger and H. Reimitz eds., *The Construction of Communities* (Brill, 2002) 155.

²⁵ *Childericus vero, cum esset nimia in luxoria dissolutus et regnaret super Francorum gentem, coepit filias eorum stuprose detrahare* (*DLH* II.12, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 61.7-8). "However, Childeric, king of the Franks, was wasted away in lust, and he began to seduce their daughters."

appear to run counter to Gregory's preferred portrayal of her. These will be discussed later. We turn first to Clothild's famous part in the conversion of Clovis, a part with which Gregory was rather more comfortable.

Clothild as Woman Wisdom

Women's words in the Bible give men an opportunity to evaluate and choose the correct path. In Proverbs 1-9, a young man is counselled by his father on the choice he must face between wisdom and foolishness, and we hear that "[a] wise man shall hear and shall be wiser: and he that understandeth, shall possess governments."²⁶ The Lord's wisdom is here personified as a woman, a figure bearing a strong resemblance to the wife that the young man's father urges him to find later in the book.²⁷ One of the good wife's most important duties, as listed in the praise of a good woman in Prov. 31, is counsel:

"She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue."²⁸

Thus, she herself becomes a channel for God's wisdom, and blends into the personified Wisdom described in Proverbs 1-9. The pursuit and attainment of a suitable woman is the pursuit of Wisdom it/herself. Foolish counsel and foolish women are to be avoided. Foolishness is also personified as a foreign or "Strange" woman,²⁹ and closely resembles

²⁶ Prov. 1.5. See Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 8; G. A. Yee, "'I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh': the Foreign Woman ('išša zārā) in Proverbs 1-9", *JSOT* 13 (Feb 1989) 53-68.

²⁷ Compare Prov. 4.9: "[wisdom] shall give to thy head increase of graces, and protect thee with a noble crown"; with 12.4: "A diligent woman is a crown to her husband". In 3.15, Woman Wisdom is described as "more precious than all riches", while 31.10 asks "Who shall find a valiant woman? far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her."

²⁸ Prov. 31.26.

²⁹ See Streete, *The Strange Woman*.

the adulteress that the young man is urged to avoid.³⁰ The “foolish young man”³¹ who goes in to see the adulteress is like the “unwise”, who are invited into the house of foolishness.³² To stray from one’s wife, or to pursue another man’s wife, is to stray from the path of God’s wisdom. Both Foolishness and the harlot stand outside their houses, like prostitutes, calling men in.³³ The wise woman, by contrast, adheres to the societal demand that she remain indoors, and by implication, within the boundaries of appropriate male authority. In so doing, she avoids bringing dishonour on her male kin.

In Book II of the *DLH*, Clothild is employed as a type of Woman Wisdom.³⁴ When she is first discovered by Clovis’s envoys in Burgundy, she is noted for her grace and understanding,³⁵ and it is on the strength of this information that Clovis proposes marriage, thus following the advice of the father in Proverbs to find a suitable wife, and to avoid the temptations of the Strange Woman, Proverbs’ female personification of foolishness and sin.

The importance of choosing a worthy wife is reprised several times over the course of Books IV and V, when Clovis’ sons and grandsons come to make their various selections. These Books contain many undignified morality tales highlighting sexual

³⁰ Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 7-8.

³¹ Prov. 7.7.

³² Prov. 9.4-5.

³³ Compare Prov. 7.11-12 (a harlot) with 9.13 (foolishness personified as female).

³⁴ See Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 8; Yee, “I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh” 53-68. See Clark, “Holy Women” 424 for a suggestion that Gregory of Nyssa portrayed his sister Macrina in a similar way.

³⁵ The envoys observed her to be *elegantem atque sapientem* (*DLH* II.28, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 73.12-13).

behaviour and partners unbecoming of kings: Chlothar and the two sisters,³⁶ Charibert's serving women,³⁷ the promise of Guntram to his dying wife,³⁸ Chilperic's murder of his new wife, the Visigothic princess Galswinth, in order to take up once more with his previous consort, Fredegund.³⁹ In contrast, Sigibert noted the poor choices made by his brothers, and elected instead to marry the Visigothic princess Brunhild.⁴⁰ He is thus imagined as making the choice between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman. Like the Wise Woman of Proverbs, Brunhild will bring her husband honour and stability. She is described as *elegans opere, venusta aspectu, honesta moribus atque decora, prudens consilio et blanda colloquio*.⁴¹ The references to elegance and wisdom remind us of the first description of Clothild.⁴² Like the earlier queen, Brunhild is also discovered in her home country by envoys of her future husband. The similarities would presumably have been flattering to Brunhild, but were probably intended primarily to draw attention to the qualities of discernment that Sigibert shared with his grandfather. Both Clovis and Sigibert have chosen wives who will be a credit to them, which in itself is a compliment

³⁶ *DLH* IV.3, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 136-137 (see below, 171-2).

³⁷ Charibert was attracted to two of his wife's serving women, Marcovefa and Merofled, and had relationships with both. A third consort, Theudechild, was the daughter of a shepherd (*DLH* IV.26, *MGH SSRM* I.1 157-159).

³⁸ Guntram's queen, Austrechild, made her husband promise that the physicians who had failed to treat her final illness would be put to death if she were to die. Shamefully, he carried out her request (*DLH* V.35, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 241-242).

³⁹ *DLH* IV.28, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 160-161. Fredegund will be discussed in detail in Chapter four of the current thesis.

⁴⁰ In his poem celebrating the union of Sigibert with Brunhild, Venantius Fortunatus drew on classical rather than Biblical imagery, but still highlighted the king's choice of an honourable marriage over lesser liaisons. "Sigibert, born to give us joy, wins his desire, he who now, free of any other love, submits to the dear bonds. His chaste mind, under the guidance of youth, seeks marriage, beating down licentious ways;" trans. in George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool, 1995) 27.

⁴¹ *DLH* IV.27, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 160.4-5. "...elegant in her deeds, lovely to look at, of honourable character and comely, wise in counsel and pleasant in conversation."

⁴² See above, note 176. Fortunatus also draws attention to Brunhild's decorousness and intelligence, though in his case within a list of her many other virtues (George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* 33).

to their own good sense, but may also indicate that they have chosen Woman Wisdom – a greater knowledge of God – over the folly of straying off the correct path, into the arms of sin. Was Gregory perhaps implying that Sigibert was Clovis’ rightful successor?

Clothild quickly begins the work of urging her husband to convert to Christianity,⁴³ becoming as she does so a channel of God’s wisdom. When her first child dies, she patiently submits to the will of God, giving thanks that her child was found worthy to gain an early entry into heaven.⁴⁴ In this, she presents an excellent example not only of Christian faith, but of Christian living. She also provides forceful arguments on the relative efficacy of the pagan and Christian Gods, the purpose of which will be discussed below.

Though Clotild’s preaching is unsuccessful, her words are recorded for the truth they reveal, and when the critical moment arrives, it is her words that Clovis remembers:

*‘Iesu Christi, quem Chrotchildis praedicat esse filium Dei vivi, qui dare
auxilium laborantibus victuriamque in te sperantibus tribuere diceris, tuae
opis gloriam devotus efflagito,’*⁴⁵

Words are essential to the vitality of the faith. Before Clovis can even confess before his followers, they call out in one voice their readiness to accept Catholicism: they are already a congregation, ready to be united in worship. In contrast, much is made of the

⁴³ Giving proof to the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife” 7:14.

⁴⁴ *DLH* II.29.

⁴⁵ *DLH* II.30, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 75.18-20. “‘Jesus Christ, whom Clothild proclaims to be Son of the living God, who are said to give assistance to those who suffer and victory to those who have hope in you, I devoutly and most urgently beg the glory of your help.’”

Burgundian Gundobad's failure to acknowledge his new Catholic faith before his people. A conversion without public acknowledgement is as good as no conversion at all. A king bears responsibility for the salvation of his subjects, and Gundobad's failing will lead his own people into falsehood.⁴⁶

This initial objective of Clovis' acceptance achieved, Clothild then acts again as a channel of God's wisdom, when she calls in Bishop Remigius to instruct the king. She has begun the work, but she then acknowledges the limitations of her role and gracefully steps aside to let the bishop do his job. Her judgment is perfect – she has influenced her husband in the right direction, without stepping on the toes of the churchman. This is a paradigm of the relationship between king, queen and bishop, and as such should not be read as a glowing demonstration of women's influence. Clothild's virtue is in knowing her limitations.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Metuens enim populum, o rex, ignorans, quia satius est, ut populus sequatur fidem tuam, quam tu infirmitate faveas populari. Tu enim es capud populi, non populus capud tuum. Si enim ad bellum proficiscaris, tu praecedis catervas hostium, et ille quo abieris subsequuntur. Unde melius est, ut te praecedente cognoscant veritatem, quam pereunte permaneant in errorem* (DLH II.34, MGH SSRM I.1, 82.10-14). “You fear the people, O king, but do you not know that it is better that the people follow your belief, than for you to follow the weakness of the populace? For you are the head of the people; the people is not your head. If you go to war, you go before the troops of your army, and they follow where you go. Hence it is better that you should lead them to the truth, than they remain in error after your death.”

⁴⁷ To use persuasive words rather than forceful ones is in itself to acknowledge the superiority of the one being persuaded. Therefore, as Janet Nelson highlights, such conversion narratives rely heavily on gender assumptions about submission of wife to husband (“Queens as Converters” 107).

Faith vs. politics

The only contemporary account of Clovis's conversion, found in a letter of Avitus of Vienne to the king, does not mention Clothild's influence.⁴⁸ This letter does, however, allude to the possibility that Clovis may have dallied with Arianism before finally accepting orthodox Catholicism, which turned out to be the more politically expedient choice. In his own kingdom, it would have helped his relations with the Catholic Church; an influential element amongst his subjects. Internationally, the Byzantine Empire had attempted to establish a rapport with Clovis, in the wake of a breakdown of relations with Theodoric the Great. Clovis apparently courted Byzantine favour in rejecting Arianism.⁴⁹ However, the idea that Arianism might have appealed to the first Catholic king of Gaul, and that his eventual choice might have been based on political expedient, was unsavoury to Gregory, who wished to style the king's conversion as spiritual epiphany based on the incontrovertible proof that Clovis's previous Gods were useless. Clothild is the first to state this:

'Nihil sunt dii quos colitis, qui neque sibi neque aliis potuerunt subvenire. Sunt enim aut ex lapide aut ex ligno aut ex metallo aliquo sculpti. Nomina vero quae eis indedistis homines fuere, non dii, ut Saturnus, qui a filio ne a regno depelleretur, per fugam elapsus adseritur, ut ipse Iovis omnium stuprorum spurcissimus perpetratur, incestatur virorum, propinquarum derisor, qui nec ab ipsius sororis propriae potuit abstinere concubitum, ut ipsa ait: Iovisque et soror et coniux. Quid Mars Mercuriusque potuere?

⁴⁸ *Epistula* 46, Eng. trans in D. Shanzer and I. Wood eds., *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool, 2002) 369-373. Cf. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 44, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," 268-70; Nelson, "Queens as Converters" 100.

⁴⁹ See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 47-49.

*Qui potius sunt magicis artibus praediti, quam divini nominis potentiam
habuere*.⁵⁰

Clothild's words remove Arianism from the picture entirely: Clovis's conversion is to be from paganism to Catholic Christianity, with no awkward stops in between, and will be based purely on the realization that the pagan gods are entirely useless.⁵¹ There is no mention of political advantage here. Clovis himself learns the truth of his queen's words through the bitterness of experience, as his words acknowledge:

*Invocavi enim deos meos, sed, ut experior, elongati sunt ab auxilio meo;
unde credo, eos nullius esse potestatis praeditos, qui sibi oboedientibus
non occurrunt*.⁵²

The character of Clothild helped Gregory to gloss over the king's motives, to gently smother any elements which might otherwise have muddled the picture. For Gregory, the conversion of the first Catholic king of Gaul should be purely motivated.⁵³

⁵⁰ *DLH* II.29, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 74.5-13. "But the gods that you worship are nothing; they are unable to help themselves, or anyone else. They are carved from stone, or from wood, or metal. The names you have bestowed on them are those of men, not of gods. Saturn, to avoid being driven out of his kingdom by his son, escaped by flight. Jupiter, dirty perpetrator of all debaucheries, who defiled men, who abused his relatives and could not abstain from intercourse with his sister, as she herself said: 'sister and wife of Jupiter'. What power did Mercury and Mars have? They were endowed with magic arts, rather than had the power of a divine name."

⁵¹ The simplicity of this account is also disputed by Georg Scheibelreiter, in "Clovis, le païen, Clotilde, la pieuse. À propos de la mentalité barbare", in M. Rouche ed., *Clovis: Histoire et Memoire* vol. 1 (Paris, 1997), who highlights strong evidence that Clovis had a highly informed understanding of Christianity, and was no simple barbarian (351).

⁵² *DLH* II.30, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 75.22-24. "For I called upon my Gods, but as I find out, they keep themselves aloof from helping me, so I believe that they have no power, for they do not come to assist those who serve them." Kathleen Mitchell (*History and Christian Society* 72, n.31) highlights the similarities between the king and queen's words, and the Biblical statements collected by Gregory in *DLH* II.10. For example, from Habakkuk 2, 18-20: *Quid prodest sculptile quod sculpservunt illud? Finxerunt illud cumflatile, fantasma mendum. Est hoc autem productio argenti et auri, et omnes spiritus non est in eis. Dominus autem in templo sancto suo: timeat a faciae eius universa terra. Sed et alius propheta dicit: Dii, qui caelum et terram non fecerunt, pereant a terra et de his qui sub caelis sunt* ("What doth the graven thing avail, because the maker thereof hath graven it, a molten, and a false image? because the forger thereof hath trusted in a thing of his own forging, to make dumb idols. Woe to him that saith to wood: Awake: to the dumb stone: Arise: can it teach? Behold, it is laid over with gold, and silver, and there is no spirit in the bowels thereof. But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him").

The conversion story as told by Gregory, while whitewashing Clovis's motives, of course also cemented the lasting reputation of his wife. Prior to Gregory's account, she had already been held up as an example to other women, for example by Nicetius of Trier, when he wrote to Clothild's granddaughter Chlodoswinth.⁵⁴ With time, Clothild's role came to be expanded. In the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, she is much more vocal in her entreaties to the king to abandon the gods of his forefathers.⁵⁵ The same work later depicts her counselling her husband before his war with the Goths.⁵⁶ In the *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, she is linked with the later queen as the first in a distinguished line of Frankish queens of admirable faith.⁵⁷ She became, in her own right, a typological reference against whom the merits of other queens could be measured.

The idea that Clothild's image has been manipulated according to Biblical models may be rather unsavoury to some, suggesting as it does that the queen is unknowable

⁵³ For an analogous story concerning Bertha, the Frankish princess who became Æthelberht of Kent's queen, see S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (Notre Dame, 2006) 19-26.

⁵⁴ See below, n. 58.

⁵⁵ 'Primum peto, ut Deum caeli, Patrem omnipotentem credas, qui te creavit. Secundo confitere dominum Iesum Christum, filium eius, qui te redemit, Regem omnium regum, a Patre de caelis missum; tertio Spiritum sanctum confirmatorem et illuminatorem omnium iustorem. Totam ineffabilem maiestatem omnipotentiamque coeternam agnosce et agnitam crede et idola vana derelinque, qui non sunt dii, sed sculptilia vana, incendeque ea et ecclesias sancta, quas succendisti, restaura' (*Liber Historiae Francorum* ch. 12, in B. Krusch ed., *MGH SSRM II* (Hannover, 1888) 257.1 – 258.1-13). "First, I ask that you believe in the God of Heaven, the almighty Father who created you. Second, confess the Lord Jesus Christ, his son, the king of all kings, who was sent from heaven by the Father, who redeemed you. Third, believe in the Holy Spirit, who confirms and illuminates all the justified. Acknowledge his ineffable, omnipotent, co-eternal majesty. Having acknowledged, believe completely. Leave your vain idols, which are not gods but vain graven images. Burn them and restore the holy churches which you burned."

⁵⁶ 'Faciens faciat dominus Deus victoriam in manibus domini mei regis. Audi ancillam tuam, et faciamus ecclesiam in honorem beatissimi Petri principe apostolorum, ut sit tibi auxiliator in bello' (*LHF* 17, in B. Krusch ed., *MGH SSRM II*, 267.16-21). "Allow the Lord God to bestow victory on the men of my lord the king. Hear your handmaid, and let us build a church in honour of the blessed Peter the prince of the apostles, that he may help you in the battle."

⁵⁷ *Vitae Sanctae Balthildis*, Eng. trans. Jo Ann McNamara, in McNamara, J.E. Halborg and E.G. Whatley eds., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham and London, 1992) 277.

outside of literary images largely created by men. However, there is also the strong possibility that an educated Christian woman would have been familiar with Biblical images of women, and may have chosen, or have been trained, to “style” herself in accordance with the ideals presented to her, one of these being the wise counsellor (the wisest piece of advice being the admonishment to accept the True Faith). As we have seen, some royal Catholic women who were to be married to pagan or Arian royal men received strong encouragement to do just that.⁵⁸

From the point of his conversion onwards, Clovis enjoys good fortune in battle. Like the Old Testament kings, his conduct could be described as questionable, but this does not matter to the one who has found God’s favour. Julia Smith suggests that Clovis is possessed of a “hyper-masculinity”, the semi-mythological nature of which places him beyond normal moral rules.⁵⁹ Clothild complements Clovis’ aggressively heroic image: he requires “softening up” before Remigius can make his approach. However, Clothild outlived her husband by several decades, and played several different roles: first wife, then widowed mother of kings alongside chaste, holy retiree. By the time that Gregory wrote his *Histories*, her historical image had not yet been smoothed over by the soothing

⁵⁸ For example, at some point in the 550s, the Merovingian princess Chlodosind received a letter from bishop Nicetius of Trier, urging her to persuade her husband, King Alboin of the Lombards, to accept the Word of God. In 601, Pope Gregory the great wrote to Bertha of Kent (Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum*.IX.35, *MGH Epist.* I.2, ed. L. Hartmann (Berlin, 1899) 304-5). In this case, the husband in question, King Æthelberht, was already Christian, but was thought to need a little encouragement in continuing the process of spreading Christianity among his own people (cf. C. Nolte, “Gender and Conversion in the Merovingian Era”, in J. Muldoon ed., *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville, 1997), 94, and Nelson, “Queens as Converters” 99-101).

⁵⁹“Carrying the cares of state” 233-4. See also Wood, “Deconstructing the Merovingian family” 155.

balm of myth and time. Gregory's portrait is testament to the competing femininities which Clothild attempted to bring into harmony during her long life.⁶⁰

Wicked influence

The ideal woman as imagined in Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20 - of whose example Clothild would have been aware - was one who would diligently teach her children about the Christian faith. In all likelihood, Clothild had played a major role in the religious instruction of her children, so it is reasonable to assume that they would have been accustomed to hearing and valuing her advice. After Clovis' death in 511, Clothild retired to Tours,⁶¹ but it is probable that her sons continued to seek her counsel. The queen features in a highly revealing triptych in Book III, chs. 3, 4 and 5, which has hitherto received no scholarly attention. In the first episode Amalaberg, the wife of Hermanfrid, a king of the Thuringians, shames her husband into taking military action against his brother Baderic.⁶² In the second, the unnamed wife of Sigismund, a Burgundian king, turns against her step-son, - Sigismund's natural son - and persuades Sigismund to kill him.⁶³ The final episode features Chlotild, now Clovis' widow, who persuades her sons to attack her cousins, the kings of Burgundy, in revenge for the murder of her parents many years before.⁶⁴ The three episodes have clearly been grouped together because of their thematic link, but it is equally evident that Gregory expected his readers to distinguish the

⁶⁰ Smith uses Fortunatus' *Carmen* IX.1, composed for the occasion of Gregory's trial at Berny-Rivière (see Introduction to the current thesis, 40, to illustrate the ways in which the perception of "manliness" had since changed ("Carrying the cares of state", 234-6).

⁶¹ *DLH* II.43.

⁶² *DLH* III.4, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100.2-6.

⁶³ *DLH* III.5, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100-101.

⁶⁴ *DLH* III.6, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101-102.

moral flavour of each, and, despite the lack of explicit comment, to recognise that Chlotild's conduct does not fall into the same execrable category as that of the other two women; the lesson is in their juxtaposition.⁶⁵ Whatever Gregory's original sources,⁶⁶ the literary stylisation, and certainly this juxtaposition of the episodes, are Gregory's own.⁶⁷

Each of the queens generates through words of persuasion an act or acts of violence. The episodes, however, differentiate righteous violence that finds God's favour, and violence that is unjust and will receive its rightful punishment. The triptych gives us crucial information about the relative capacity of the kings to evaluate counsel, one of the vital determinants of the overall success of a ruler in any age, and of his / her appraisal by posterity.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ The idea that Gregory of Tours wished his readers to derive an unstated moral lesson from the grouping of the three chosen episodes takes for granted that he was not artless in his selection of material. This is the general consensus among most scholars of Gregory's works. See for example Goffart, in his *Narrators of Barbarian History* (233) and numerous refs in Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*. Heinzelmann highlights the failure of previous scholarship to engage with the importance of the chapter as "the individual building block of the *DLH*' structure". "[I]t is the selection of thematic chapters and their relevant situation within particular books that gives particular parts of the work their respective themes" (Ibid. 115).

⁶⁶ For example, he had family connections with the see of Lyons in Burgundy, so he possibly heard rumours of goings-on at Sigismund's court from visitors to his family home. He is also known to have enjoyed a friendship with Radegund (†587), one of the queens of King Chlothar (†561). She was the niece of Hermanfrid, who killed her parents, (*DLH* III.4) and it is likely that from the time of her parents' death until Hermanfrid's, she was in her uncle's charge.

⁶⁷ It is likely that he continued to use this method to a large extent throughout his career, collating information from oral sources – Tours, an important pilgrimage site and a stopping-point on the route south, would have seen many visitors with tales to tell – and incorporating it into his work.

⁶⁸ The story of Chramn is also a cautionary tale on the dangers of poor counsel: *Multae enim causae tunc per eum irrationabiliter gerebantur, et ob hoc acceleratus est de mundo; multum enim maledicebatur a populo. Nullum autem hominem diligebat, a quo consilium bonum utilemque possit accipere, nisi collectis vilibus personis aetate iuvene fluctuantibus, eosdem tantummodo diligebat, eorumque consilium audiens, ita ut filias senatorum, datis praeceptionibus, eisdem vi detrahi iuberet* (*DLH* IV.13, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 144.6-11). "He was irrational in much that he did, and his early death was caused by this. He was much cursed by the people. He loved no man from whom it was possible to receive good counsel. He collected around him a vile group of young people from the lesser classes, and esteemed their counsel only, thus by decree he ordered that the daughters of the senators be abducted forcibly."

To give a more detailed account of each episode, in *DLH* III.4, Hermanfrid comes to dinner one day expecting a meal that befits a king, to find that the table is only half-laid. The word *convivium* tells us that this was a communal meal.⁶⁹ The whole household would have been present, as well as any guests. When he asks his wife what is meant by this, she replies that, as he holds only half of the Thuringian kingdom, he deserves to have half of his table left bare.⁷⁰ This rouses the king into action, and is the impetus for him seeking the help of the Frankish kings against his brother.⁷¹ Ultimately, it also proves to be his ruin, as his failure to honour the terms of his agreement with the Frankish kings brings about his undoing.⁷²

In *DLH* III.5, Sigismund has lost his first wife, the daughter of King Theodoric of Italy,⁷³ and has taken a second, an unnamed woman, who, according to the accusations of her stepson, Sigistrix, was a servant of Sigismund's previous wife. Tension between the woman and her stepson comes to a head on a festival day, when the boy spots that the woman is wearing his mother's clothes. He denounces her as unworthy, reminding her of her previously servile status,⁷⁴ whereupon she goes to her husband and begins to accuse

⁶⁹ *DLH* III.4, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100.3.

⁷⁰ '*Qui [...] a medio regno spoliatur, decet eum mensae medium habere nudatum*' (Ibid, lines 5-6). "For he who is robbed of half of his kingdom, it is appropriate that he should have half of his table stripped."

⁷¹ Ibid, lines 7-8.

⁷² *DLH* III.7-8, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 103-106.

⁷³ Theodoric links these two chapters: Amalaberg was his niece and Sigismund's first wife his daughter. Another of his daughters was married to Alaric, king of the Visigoths, and his sister to Thrasamund, king of the Vandals (J. L. Nelson, "Making a Difference in Eighth-Century Politics: The Daughters of Desiderius" in A.C. Murray ed., *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History* (Toronto, 1998) 175. Theodoric was himself married to Clovis' sister, Audofleda.

⁷⁴ '*Non enim eras digna, ut haec indumenta tua terga contegerent, quae dominae tuae, id est matre meae, fuisse nuscuntur*' (*DLH* III.5, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101.3-4). "You were not worthy to cover your back with these clothes, for it is well known that they belonged to my mother, who was your mistress."

the boy of plotting against his father.⁷⁵ Sigismund, incited by these accusations, arranges for his son to be killed by two servants,⁷⁶ an action he instantly regrets. Again, this episode, while not perhaps directly leading to the fall of the Burgundian royal house, is presented as evidence enough of the weakness that will be its ruin. Sigismund has in fact done away with one of his heirs, a boy whom Gregory has a bystander declare as having been an innocent.⁷⁷

The final episode concerns Chlotild, who calls her sons to her and asks them to avenge the death of her parents.⁷⁸ Chlodomer, Childebert and Chlothar attack Burgundy, and Sigismund and his family are captured and killed.⁷⁹ The timing of this revenge seems a little strange; it is a good many years since Chlotild lost her parents.⁸⁰ It is likely, as Ian Wood has suggested, that avenging the death of Chlotild's parents provided a convenient excuse for a campaign that the brothers wished to carry out anyway.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Sigismund's wife suggests that the young man wishes to rule over not only his father's kingdom, but also the territories once ruled over by his grandfather, Theodoric. This was not a completely unrealistic ambition, and would have been a painful reminder to Sigismund of any feelings of inferiority that he may once have felt towards his father-in-law. It might also have focused his attention on the fact that his son's lineage was far superior to his own.

⁷⁶ This happened in 522 (Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101).

⁷⁷ *DLH* III.5, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101.14. The bystander is a proxy for Gregory himself, and passes judgment on his behalf. There are various Biblical resonances of the murder of innocent children. The most famous is King Herod's decision to eliminate all male children of Bethlehem under the age of two, in the hope of destroying the Christ child whose coming had been associated with Herod's own doom (Matthew 2.16-18). Other examples are: Exodus 12.29-30, Joshua 7.20-25, Numbers 31.1-18, Psalms 137.8-9.

⁷⁸ *'Non me paeneteat, carissimi, vos dulciter enutrisse; indignate, quaeso, iniuriam meam et patris matrisque meae mortem sagaci studio vindecate'* (*DLH* III.6, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101.20-102.1). "Let me not repent, my dearly beloved, having nourished you so sweetly; be outraged, I pray, by the injury done to me and pursue with wise zeal vengeance for the deaths of my father and mother."

⁷⁹ *DLH* III.6.

⁸⁰ We are told of their deaths at II.28, which is dated to c.491, (Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 73, and the attack on Burgundy does not take place until 523.

⁸¹ I. Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis," *RBPH* 63 252-3. Despite that fact that vengeance was not the only, or even the main, aim of the Burgundian campaign, Chlodomer chose to murder Sigismund in a way

The inclusion of Clothild in this triptych gives pause for thought. However, there are Biblical precedents for a woman to call for righteous warfare. The best known is Esther, who persuaded her husband to make war on those who had threatened to destroy her own people.⁸² A closer analysis of Gregory's triptych also makes clear that, while the first two women incite violence which causes chaos *within* a family – between brothers in the first case and between a father and son in the second – Chlotild persuades her sons to avenge her by attacking another kingdom. The Burgundian campaign is one which contributes to the eventual uniting of Gaul under the rulership of a single Merovingian dynasty. In this, she is very much the counterpart of her husband, who also appears to use morally questionable means to achieve his ends, and this episode is part of Gregory's characterisation of her as a fine woman whose ambitions, like those of Clovis, were for the unity of Gaul. Clovis's conduct has also drawn comment for its ambiguity, but Gregory's position is really quite clear, given his feelings on Gallic unity and civil wars. As he tells us in the preface to Bk. V, it is really no wonder that the kings of his own time experience such difficulties when, rather than directing their energies against outside enemies as their ancestors had done, they quarrel amongst themselves and fail to respect the churches.⁸³

that was reminiscent of the murders of Chlotild's parents. Vengeance seems to have constituted the justification for an otherwise unjustifiable action, so Chlodomer chose to link the deaths to emphasise this aspect.

⁸² Chs. 9-10, but for another example see Judges chs 4-5.

⁸³ *Utinam et vos, o regis, in his proelia, in quibus parentes vestri desudaverunt, exercimini, ut gentes, vestra pace conterritae, vestris viribus praemirentur! Recordamini, quid capud victuriarum vestrarum Chlodovechus fecerit, qui adversos reges interficet, noxias gentes elisit, patrias subiugavit, quarum regnum vobis integrum inlesumque reliquit!* (DLH. V.Pref, MGH SSRM I.1, 193.8-12). "I would that you, O king, were roused to those wars in which your relatives laboured, that the nations, alarmed by your harmony, might be overwhelmed by your strength! Call to mind what Clovis did, who began your victories, he destroyed those kings who were hostile to him, noxious peoples were crushed to death, and their lands brought under subjection, thus leaving you the kingdom, whole and unimpaired."

Whereas he does not specifically praise Chlotild for her choice of mission, the absence of negative adjectives in her description is telling. While the other women featured in the triptych are cruel and unjust, no such words are used of her.⁸⁴ The inclusion of Chlotild with the other two women is therefore not intended to tar her with the same brush; the deliberate juxtaposition of the three episodes allows for the proper evaluation of Chlotild's conduct,⁸⁵ and Gregory expected his readers to be able to do this.

The Bible also employs the device of juxtaposition. In Genesis, the story of Tamar, who seduces her father-in-law, Judah, in order to conceive by him after his sons have failed to give her children, is juxtaposed with that of Potiphar's wife, who attempts to seduce the virtuous Joseph. No specific comment is given, but the reader is expected to read the two tales in light of one another.⁸⁶ While Tamar works for the continuance of Judah's line, and can thus be regarded as a virtuous woman who showed due respect for patriarchal authority, Potiphar's wife threatens family integrity through attempted adultery. She is given no name; her designation alerts us to the fact that her sexuality belongs to Potiphar, highlighting her crime in offering herself to another man. She is "a

⁸⁴ Amalaberg is "*iniqua et crudelis*", (*DLH* III.4, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100.2), while Sigismund follows the counsel "*uxoris iniquae*" (*DLH* III.5, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 101.9).

⁸⁵ Chlodomer is killed by the Burgundians while on campaign, but Gregory does not link this with the Burgundian campaign in a general sense. He tells us that the bishop Avitus had warned Chlodomer that his treatment of Sigismund if he were to capture him would be visited on himself. Chlodomer ignores this warning and kills Sigismund and his family. That the bishop's warning is included in the same chapter as Chlotild's exhortation to her sons suggests that Gregory was aware of how the outcome for Chlodomer could be misinterpreted, but as far as Gregory is concerned, Chlodomer's punishment comes about because of his failure to heed the warning of the bishop, rather than because he had granted the request of his mother (*DLH* III.6). Chlotild cannot be blamed: her behaviour in this episode is consistent with her characterisation elsewhere in the *DLH* as a laudable woman, and as a suitable partner to Clovis in the aim of Gallic unity.

⁸⁶ Streete, *The Strange Woman* 52.

stock character in a cautionary tale.”⁸⁷ Here, as in Gregory’s triptych, the matter at issue is really the implications of female behaviour for the men in the stories.

Gregory’s use of juxtaposition has been noted by Martin Heinzelman.⁸⁸ However, the way in which the device can illuminate investigations into gender in the *DLH* has not been noted. The relevant chapters need not be adjacent: I.44 and I.47 are closely related, the first telling the tale of a bishop who has put his wife aside in order to devote himself more fully to God.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, he falls prey to his wife’s demands for a resumption of their conjugal relations.⁹⁰ I.47 tells the tale of a young man, newly married, whose young wife persuades him that if they live chaste, rather than fulfilling familial expectations to produce children, they will receive their reward in heaven. Thus, the ability to discern between good and foolish counsel has little to do with what society might expect, given the social position of the individual in question.

⁸⁷ Streete, *The Strange Woman* 52. Once again, there is an inverse parallel in Anglo-Saxon literature. In his version of the Old Testament Book of Kings, Ælfric comments on the king’s susceptibility to his wife’s wicked counsel. Stacey Klein argues that that Ælfric uses the book to comment on the importance of a king’s ability to differentiate between good and bad counsel, and on the king’s duty to surround himself with counsellors who will advise him well: a prickly issue during the reign of Æthelred Unræd. He illustrates the fates that befall those kings who do not attend to these matters as they should (*Ruling Women* 148-9).

⁸⁸ *Gregory of Tours* 116-7. Guy Halsall has warned against treating chapters as discrete units, and has demonstrated the ways in which a more unified reading can be more fruitful (“Nero and Herod?” 337-350).

⁸⁹ We are told that she was living *remota a consortio sacerdotis*, and that this was *juxta consuetudinem ecclesiasticam*. Clerical chastity was an ideal that was spreading over the course of the fourth century, but was by no means a universal requirement in Gaul as yet. The custom to which Gregory refers was a local one (C. Cochini, *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy* (San Francisco, 1990) 127).

⁹⁰ Her words encapsulate the debate: St. Paul had indeed enjoined husbands and wives to be sexually available to one another. However, there is no debate about the moral colour of the episode as relayed here. The Devil, “ever jealous of holiness”, arouses her with desire for her husband, and like “a new Eve” she tempted her husband back into the marriage bed: *‘Quousque sacerdos dormis? Quousque hostia clausa non reseras? Cur satellitem spernes? Cur obduratis auribus Pauli praecepta non audis? Scripsit enim: Revertimini ad alterutrum, ne temptet vos Satanas. Ecce! ego ad te revertor, nec ad extraneum, sed ad proprium vas recurro’* (MGH SSRM I.1, 29.5-9). “How long will you sleep, bishop? For how long will you refuse to open these closed doors? Why do you scorn your companion? Why do you harden your ears to the precepts of Paul? For he wrote: “Return together again, lest Satan tempt you”? Behold! I return to you, not to a stranger, but to the vessel which is my own.”

However, the device is seen at its most potent when it regards the personal life of the king. In describing the actions of Amalaberg and Sigismund's wife, Gregory draws on, in the first case, ideas surrounding women and food, and the role that they are expected to play at a communal meal and, in the second, a very pervasive cultural stereotype of the figure of the stepmother. The knowledge of these cultural assumptions that he shares with his readers helps him to reinforce the contrast of their behaviour with that of Clothild.⁹¹

Choosing a successor.

The marriage of Chlotild's stepson, Theuderic, to the daughter of Sigismund, had created a potentially threatening link. In calling her sons to vengeance, Clothild mentions that she nursed them.⁹² All of a Merovingian king's children were considered to have royal blood, whether they were legitimate or not,⁹³ rendering succession politics rather complex. However, Clothild's nursing of her sons established a relationship with them through a mother's milk: it was a connection that she wished to override any loyalty that they might feel towards Theuderic, who shared their father's blood. Alternatively, this connection was invoked by the brothers to excuse their subsequent action: Chlothild's three sons came together to counter the threat posed by Theuderic's marriage, using the

⁹¹ There are some Biblical examples of women acting to secure the interests of their own children over those of stepchildren, (for example, in Gen. 21: 9-10, Sarah persuades Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away; in I Kings 1: 15-31, Bathsheba manages to persuade King David that her own son, Solomon, should succeed him in place of his older son by another woman, Adonijah) but the image of the "wicked stepmother" is primarily a relic of Roman culture. See P.A. Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality* (Leiden, 1995).

⁹² '... vos dulciter enutrisse', (DLH III.6, MGH SSRM I.1, 101.20).

⁹³ DLH V.20, MGH SSRM I.1, 228.11-13.

pretext of avenging a mother that they, but not Theuderic, shared.⁹⁴ In fact, the latter interpretation need not preclude the former. Clothild may have encouraged her sons in expansionist ambitions, and may have helped them to frame these in an acceptable way.

Gregory presents Clothild as extremely ambitious. Having more than one son “offered the queen, [...] opportunities to divide and rule”,⁹⁵ and Clothild was amply blessed. In exhorting her sons to carry out vengeance on her behalf, she encouraged them in the warlike behaviour that would allow them to live up to their famous father. Clovis’ single-minded pursuit of rulership over Gaul led him to eliminate even members of his own family, an act whose “*efficacité surnaturelle*” showed him to be far above the normal rules which bound the lower orders of society, therefore reinforcing his status.⁹⁶ It may be significant that when Clothild makes her plea to her sons, only Chlodomer, the eldest,⁹⁷ is mentioned by name.⁹⁸ This is also the case in the ensuing campaign. Was the vengeance mission perhaps an opportunity for her oldest son and current favourite, to set himself apart from his brothers, and to confirm that he was the most warlike, and therefore most

⁹⁴ S. White, “Chlotild’s Revenge: Politics, Kinship and Ideology in the Merovingian Blood Feud”, in S.K. Cohn and S.A. Epstein eds., *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living* (Michigan, 1996) 107-130. This is rather like the moral imperative that Clovis found – or that churchmen recording the event found on his behalf – for an attack against the Visigoths. He declared that he found it difficult to tolerate the fact that Arian heretics were occupying a part of Gaul. ‘*Valde molestum fero, quod hi Arriani partem teneant Galliarum. Eamus cum Dei adiutorium, et superatis redeamus terram in ditione nostra*’ (DLH II.37, MGH SSRM I.1, 85.5-7). “I find it very irritating that these Arians hold a part of Gaul. Let us go with God’s help and invade them, and bring their territory under our dominion.”

⁹⁵ Nelson, “Medieval Queenship” 194.

⁹⁶ Le Jan, “La sacralité” 1234.

⁹⁷ DLH II.29. Her firstborn son had died shortly after baptism.

⁹⁸ *Chrodechildis vero regina Chlodomerem vel reliquos filius suos adloquitur* (DLH III.6, MGH SSRM I.1, 101.19). “Queen Clothild addressed Chlodomer and the rest of her sons.”

suitable, leading heir of Clovis?⁹⁹ There was some logic in her actions as far as the dynasty was concerned: Childebert had only daughters,¹⁰⁰ and Clothar was perhaps already showing signs of difficulty in the governing of his sexual appetite, to the extent that his own lineage may have become rather complex.¹⁰¹ Clothild was perhaps anxious that her husband's heir should have legitimate sons.¹⁰²

After Chlodomer's death, Clothild took charge of his young sons, loving them with great affection,¹⁰³ and was overjoyed when her two other sons, Childebert and Chlothar, the boys' uncles, proposed that the boys should be sent to them to be crowned:

*"Non me puto amisisse filium, si vos videam in eius regno substitui."*¹⁰⁴

These words, and the depth of her grief, are suggestive of the great investment of hope that she had placed in the boys' father.

Chlothar and Childebert had in fact become concerned at the affection Clothild was showing to the boys. Once they had taken possession of the young princes, they sent

⁹⁹ She was not the only mother to encourage her sons to excel through rivalry: Alfred the Great's mother encouraged her children to learn by promising a book of poetry to the one who could learn it by heart the fastest. See Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ch. 23 in *Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes (London, 1983) 75. See J. Nelson, "Medieval Queenship", in L. E. Mitchell ed., *Women in Medieval Western European Culture* (New York and London, 1998) 194-5 for this and other less harmless examples.

¹⁰⁰ At least, no acknowledged son is ever mentioned, which would be odd if any did indeed exist (see Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family" 166). The fate befalling his wife and daughters after his death is detailed in *DLH* IV.20, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 152.

¹⁰¹ *Denique ipse rex de diversis mulieribus septim filius habuit* (*DLH* IV.3, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 136.10). "Indeed, the king had seven sons by different women." When one of his wives, Ingund, asked him to find a worthy husband for her sister, his solution was to marry her himself (*DLH* IV.3).

¹⁰² See Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family" 157-171 for details of individuals who had claimed to be Merovingian, but about whom there was doubt.

¹⁰³ *DLH* III.18, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 117.19-20.

¹⁰⁴ *DLH* III.18, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 118.10-11. "I will not think that I have lost a son, if I see you take his place in the kingdom."

a messenger to their mother, offering her the choice of having the boys tonsured or killed. She chose the latter option, saying that she would rather see them dead than shorn, as to lose their hair would be tantamount to losing their royal status. At worst, this suggests a ruthless queen who was uninterested in her grandsons if she could not wield power through influencing their rule as kings. This is not, however, the interpretation Gregory chooses. He tells us that Chlotild was rendered insensible with grief over Chlodomer's death and was unable to think clearly;¹⁰⁵ something that the messenger, Arcadius, did not take into consideration when he rushed back to Chlothar and Childebert with the queen's half-formed decision. Might this be an explanation that Clothild herself left to posterity at Tours, where she spent her retirement? It certainly has a ring of self-exoneration.

It was only after her grandsons were killed that Clothild retired from an active political life,¹⁰⁶ having come to terms, perhaps, with the difficulties inherent in attempting to control and manipulate her sons. In holy retirement at Tours, she continued to pursue her ambitions through rather more subtle means, switching her allegiance, I suggest, to Chlothar: a decision that is a little difficult to comprehend in the light of her grief over her grandsons. Consider the following episode: in III.28, Kings Childebert and Theudebert prepared to make war on their brother and uncle, Chlothar. Hearing of this, Clothild *beati Martini sepulchrum adiit, ibique in oratione prosternitur et tota nocte vigilat, orans, ne inter filios suos bellum civile consurgeret*.¹⁰⁷ The attack was halted by a

¹⁰⁵ She spoke *ignorans in ipso dolore quid diceret* (DLH 3.18, MGH SSRM I.1, 118.18-19).

¹⁰⁶ DLH III.18.

¹⁰⁷ DLH III.28, MGH SSRM I.1, 124.12-14. She "visited the tomb of the blessed Martin and there fell prostrate in prayer, praying all night lest civil war rise up between her sons."

storm of thunder, lightning and hailstones,¹⁰⁸ and Childebert and Theudebert were brought to realise the error of their ways. Gregory chooses to emphasise that this was brought about due to the power of St. Martin, and the queen's intercessionary prayers.¹⁰⁹

This episode takes place after the murder of Chlodomer's sons. In the event, Childebert's resolve had failed him, and it was Chlothar who went ahead and completed the dastardly plan.¹¹⁰ At this point, he perhaps proved himself to be the most warlike of his brothers: he was the one most likely to kill to eliminate rivals, even when these were members of his family – perhaps this very willingness to dispose of relatives was the crucial element¹¹¹ – and was thus the true successor of his father and grandfather. It may have been after this incident that Clothild, after emerging from the dark tunnel of grief for her grandsons, decided to throw her weight behind Chlothar. In praying for him, she not

¹⁰⁸ This passage is reminiscent of Isaiah 30.30, in which the voice of God is heard in rain, thunder and hail: *..et auditam faciet Dominus gloriam vocis suae et terrorem brachii sui ostendet in comminatione furoris et flamma ignis devorantis adlidet in turbine et in lapide grandinis*. (“And the Lord shall make the glory of his voice to be heard, and shall shew the terror of his arm, in the threatening of wrath, and the flame of devouring fire: he shall crush to pieces with whirlwind, and hailstones.”)

¹⁰⁹ *Quod nullus ambigat, hanc per obtentum reginae beati Martini fuisse virtutem (MGH SSRM I.1, 125.8-9)*. “No one can doubt that this was the power of the blessed Martin, through the intercession of the queen.”

¹¹⁰ *Nec mora, adpraehensum Chlothacharius puerum seniore brachium elesit in terra, defixumque cultrum in ascella, crudiliter interfecit. Quo vociferante, frater eius ad pedes Childeberthi prosternitur, adpraehensaue eius genua, agebat cum lacrimis: ‘Succurre, piissime pater, ne et ego peream sicut frater meus’. Tunc Childeberthus, lacrimis respersa facie, ait: ‘Rogo, dulcissime frater, ut huius mihi vitam tua largitate concedas, et quae iusseris pro eius animam conferam, tantum ne interficiatur’. At ille convitiis actum ait: ‘Aut eiece eum a te, aut certe pro eo morieris. Tu’, inquit, “es incestatur huius causae, et tam velociter de fide risillis?’ Haec ille audiens, repulsum a se puerum proiecit ad eum; ipse vero excipiens, transfixum cultro in latere, sicut fratrem prius fecerat, ingulavit; (DLH III.18, MGH SSRM I.1, 119.1-11).* “Without delay, Chlothar grappled the older boy by the arm, and knocking him to the ground, thrust the knife into his armpit, putting him cruelly to death. Whereupon he screamed, and his brother fell prostrate at the feet of Childebert, and grabbing him around the knees, through his tears said: Save me, holy father, lest I perish like my brother.” Then Childebert, his face covered with tears, said: “I beg, beloved brother, that in your goodness you grant his life to me. I will give anything in exchange for his soul, only do not put him to death.” But Chlothar abused him, saying: “Either cast him from you, or you yourself will die in his place. You” he said “began this affair, and now you recoil so quickly from your pledge?” Hearing these things, Childebert drove the boy from him and cast him to Chlothar, who, on receiving him, ran him through with a knife in his side, and so killed him as he had done his brother.”

¹¹¹ See above, 73-4.

only demonstrated this support, but also invoked the patronage of St. Martin, whom Clovis had taken as his special protector. Through this prayer, Clothild cemented the relationship between Chlothar and St. Martin, thus supplying another crucial element of Chlothar's legitimacy as the true ruler of the Franks.

In his "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family", Ian Wood explores the implications of the Merovingian family tree's malleability. "Being a Merovingian was a matter of perception rather than biology"¹¹² and women could work to secure the succession for their favourites. Naturally, they would tend to favour their own offspring.¹¹³ However, in a case where the queen had several potentially suitable sons, perhaps her own intuition was crucial.¹¹⁴ Clothild appears to have made a discerning choice between her own sons, based on criteria established by previous generations, and exemplified for us in the *DLH* in the person of Clovis. Perhaps by directing their attention outwards to the Burgundian kingdom, Clothild hoped to help her sons reach an understanding without resorting to civil war.¹¹⁵ It is worthwhile to ponder how far this aim of Clothild's could be understood as a recognised and tolerated role. A parallel may be found in late sixth-century Italy, where the Lombard queen Theodelinda was thought

¹¹² Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family" 164.

¹¹³ See, for example, Fredegund's efforts to have her son Chlothar acknowledged, by summoning men in what had been Chilperic's kingdom, to swear an oath that the boy was legitimate (*DLH* VIII.9, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 376). She was also famously ruthless in the destruction of her stepsons (Guntram Boso had allegedly enjoyed her favour because he had killed Theudebert (*DLH* V.18); she is implicated in the death of the younger Clovis (*DLH* V.39); and is eventually also accused of Merovech's murder (*DLH* VII.7, 14).

¹¹⁴ Might intuition also have played a role when the queen herself had *no* suitable offspring? This may shed some new light on the case of Gundovald, who cited the endorsement of Chlothar's one-time queen Radegund in his plea for recognition (*DLH* VII.36, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 358).

¹¹⁵ Chapter four of this thesis will argue that Fredegund's efforts to "weed-out" her step-sons, however brutal, actually had the effect of preventing bloodshed between all the sons of Chilperic later on (171-2).

to possess sufficient wisdom to select her second husband, who would also succeed her first husband as king.¹¹⁶

Clothild and St. Martin

As we have seen, Chlothar, when faced with war against his brother and nephew, had put his faith in God. God rewarded his hope through St. Martin, and his mother's prayers. It is Chlothar who is the longest-lived of Clovis's sons, arguably signalling his favour with the saint. But he has this favour only as long as he continues to respect Martin – he has to be reminded of this when he attempts to tax the church.¹¹⁷ Gregory's excuses for the queen's actions towards her grandsons may tell us something about the role he needed her to play in his narrative. She and Clovis are vital for bringing the focus of the *DLH* to Tours, and for establishing St. Martin's status as the patron saint of the Merovingian dynasty, but Gregory makes no excuses for the actions of Clovis, who rampages, battleaxe aloft, through the second Book, basking in the assurance of his newly-adopted God's pre-approval of his actions. Was Clothild perhaps even more important, in narrative terms, to the establishment of the connection to St Martin,¹¹⁸ and therefore more important to Gregory's consolidation of his own political position? This may explain why Gregory feels the need to explain her actions with regard to her

¹¹⁶ Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, ch. III, trans. W. D. Foulke, ed. E. Peters (Philadelphia, 2003) 149.

¹¹⁷ *DLH* IV.2, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 136.1-9. It may be significant that we are told of this incident in the chapter after we learn of Clothild's death, and it is here that the bishops of Tours become vital for the first time, as they attempt to remind their kings of the debt owed by the Merovingians to St. Martin. Had Clothild worked hard to remind her sons of this debt, as well as praying to the saint to look favourably upon her sons, as he had done on her husband?

¹¹⁸ The possibility that Gregory (and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and Fredegar) played down those of Clothild's actions that could be interpreted in the light of pagan ideas of family honour, in order to emphasize the queen's Christian virtues and actions, is explored by Georg Scheibelreiter, in "Clovis, le païen, Clotilde, la pieuse" 349-367.

grandsons; an incident with which he clearly struggled. The *DLH* apparently presents incontrovertible proof that Martin was the foremost saint in Gaul, and Tours by extension the foremost see, but this was by no means a foregone conclusion. The decision of both Clovis and Clothild to be buried in Paris at St. Peter's church might suggest a more ready identification of the dynasty's fortunes with St. Genovefa, who was also buried there.¹¹⁹ However, this saint merits only a somewhat cursory single reference in the *DLH*.¹²⁰

In Gregory's portrayal, it is Clothild who cements the relationship between St. Martin, Tours, and Merovingian success. She is presented as having effectively become a godmother to her own descendants, serving St. Martin, apparently selflessly, in order to ensure the fortune of the dynasty. As she was a bridge between the secular and the holy for her husband and Remigius, she also became a bridge between St Martin and the next generation of kings. For Gregory, she was the custodian of Martin's patronage of the dynasty.

Of course, her selflessness may have been only apparent. The prayer, and its outcome, also cemented Clothild's own association with St. Martin, and by no means represented her only effort to this end. She took an interest in the see of Tours, and had a hand in appointing several of its bishops.¹²¹ She also sponsored a man named

¹¹⁹ C.f. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge, 2007) 2.

¹²⁰ ...in qua et Genuveifa beatissima est sepulta (*DLH* IV.1, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 135.20).

¹²¹ Gregory's list of the bishops of Tours is rather confused at this point. In the list of the bishops of Tours at *DLH* X.31, we are told that Licinius was the ninth bishop, and after him were the tenth bishops, Theodorus and Proculus, who apparently held the see jointly, and were appointed on the orders of Clothild. The eleventh, also appointed at her command, was Dinifius (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 531-2). However, in III.2, Licinius appears immediately before Difinius (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 98.3-4).

Theodomund who was miraculously cured at St. Martin's tomb. Through her assistance, he went on to enjoy a distinguished career as a cleric.¹²² By associating herself so firmly with the patron saint of the Merovingian dynasty, she associated herself with the source of its continuing success, and therefore with that success itself.

Conclusion

This chapter has clearly demonstrated that the actions of royal women, as they are described in the *DLH*, helped to cement the legitimacy of the early Merovingian kings. For Gregory, this meant establishing the legitimacy of the Merovingians as leaders of the latest incarnation of God's kingdom on earth. For the first time, it has been shown that the women of the *DLH*'s early Books are Biblically modelled, and that their characters can – and are perhaps primarily intended to – enrich our understanding of the Merovingian kings and their contemporaries.

I have focused on Clothild, who gained fame for her role in Clovis' conversion. She was cited by mediaeval writers as an exemplar for later royal women, lauded by late twentieth-century feminists as proof personified of women's power and impact on the historical record. However, the persuasive voice is gendered; the woman who uses persuasion does so because she is appealing to a superior.¹²³ Clothild's example is therefore not one that can be used to demonstrate female equality, or even female agency. The conversion story was also highly stylised, and there may have been good reason for Gregory to emphasise Clothild's role, as we have seen.

¹²² The story is told in *VM* 1.7., *MGH SSRM* I.2, 592-3, and Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 209.

¹²³ See above, 60 n.47.

It may have been in those elements of legitimacy less palatable to Gregory, or even to ourselves, that female influence had more immediate impact. The Merovingians' battle prowess was crucial to the kingly image. Basina pinpointed Childeric as the most warlike man of his generation, and therefore the most worthy of the kingship, while Clothild made a selection from among her own sons. Difficult for us to reconcile with Gregory's image of the saintly Clothild is her transference of allegiance to Chlothar, the murderer of her young grandsons. However, it was perhaps this very act that marked Chlothar as the true successor of his father.

Gregory the Catholic bishop struggled at times to reconcile the various elements of Clothild's career. As readers we see her taking advantage of the various roles open to her to further her power and influence. With time, the parts of her role that were less acceptable to a Christian sensibility would be smoothed over, while those more agreeable were expanded.¹²⁴ Gregory's more textured version surely gives us a more rounded image of the queen who would become a saint.

Gregory was more than comfortable with Clothild's adherence to St. Martin. The Merovingians' respect for this saint was, for Gregory, the single most important factor in the continuing success of the dynasty, and this chapter has shown that Clothild was essential to Gregory's demonstration of this fact. The ability to prove this inextricable link was crucial for Gregory's own career as bishop of Tours. Thus we see him begin to

¹²⁴ Her *Vita* fudges the account of the deaths of Chlodomer's sons, saying that Clothild was tricked into handing them over because she believed that their uncles wished to crown them (*MGH SSRM* II, 341-48).

prepare the groundwork for the character that he himself was to play in the *Histories*: a worthy incumbent of the see of Tours, who would let no respect of persons stand in the way of his duty to champion orthodoxy, to remind kings of their responsibilities before God, and ultimately to lead his flock to salvation.

Chapter 3

Gender, Violence and Heresy

*Hermenefrede vero uxor iniqua atque crudelis Amalaberga nomen inter
hos fratres bellum civile dissimulat.*¹

The previous chapter introduced Amalaberg, who carries the dubious honour of being the only person in the *DLH* to be described as cruel.² As previously suggested, the anecdote in which she shames her husband into making war upon his brother is primarily designed as an indictment of Hermanfrid's judgment. The qualities and success of a ruler were, for Gregory, inextricably and inevitably linked with the religious choices made by that ruler. Following the correct faith, as Clovis had done and as his sons continued to do, implied the possession of a range of other virtues essential in a king, such as the ability to distinguish wise counsel from foolish. Thus, the tale of Amalaberg's insidious comment and its end result forms a part of Gregory's demonstration of the divergent fates of Arians and Catholics.

The current chapter offers an analysis of the interplay between Arianism and gender. The heresy of Arianism makes several appearances in the *DLH*. While Gregory's use of Arianism has been discussed,³ there has been no attempt by scholars to address the

¹ *DLH* III.4, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100.2-3. "Hermanfrid had a wife by the name of Amalaberg, who was wicked and cruel, and sowed the seeds of civil war between these brothers."

² People behave cruelly and commit cruel acts, but Amalaberg is the only person, male or female, of whom the word is used adjectivally of the personality itself.

³ See for example Goffart, *Narrators*, 213 ff.; K. Mitchell, *History and Christian Society*, 84 ff., 114 ff., 223; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, 126, 156; Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, 106-9.

disproportionate role played by women in these anecdotes, either as martyrs who staunchly defended their faith against increasingly hostile Arian captors, orthodox Catholic princesses who went to the Visigothic kingdom to marry Arian princes, or reprehensible Arian queens or princesses, styled, it will be argued, as Biblical “Strange” women.

Portrayals of the character and experiences of heretical women, of the brave Catholic women who staunchly defend their faith in the face of immense pressure to convert, and of those women, Arian by birth, who readily convert to Catholicism on their entry into Gaul, are crucial to the understanding of the role played by Arianism in the *DLH*. All draw on gendered assumptions about ‘correct’ behaviour of men and women and their relative status. While Catholic men and women generally adhered to these roles, Arian couples did not. Catholic wives and daughters were held in submission, were chaste, gentle and virtuous: Arian women were domineering, uncontrolled, even violent, and prone to sexual profligacy. These antithetical images are analogous to Gregory’s perception of the contrasts between the two doctrines. While Catholicism is characterised by integrity and purity, Arianism is loose, its boundaries permeable; it has a threatening fluidity against which Catholics must be rigidly vigilant. Arianism is, for Gregory, essential to his definition of his own faith, and therefore to the justification of his own moral authority.

By Gregory’s time, the female body was imbued with metaphorical meaning, and he would have been familiar with the Old Testament, and the Christian patristic, practice

of using female figures to articulate concerns about religious “Otherness”. This chapter will for the first time examine the ways in which Gregory himself made use of such symbolism in his own discussions of orthodoxy and heresy. Here I will examine the association made by the *DLH* between women and Arianism in the light of feminist Biblical research, which has noted that women tend to appear in the Old Testament as literary devices for the condemnation of, for example, apostasy, rather than as fully rounded characters.

Gregory’s Arianism

A precise definition of Arian doctrine contributes little to an understanding of the heresy’s role in the *DLH*. Suffice to say, it was a Trinitarian heresy, which regarded Jesus Christ as a created being, and therefore subordinate to the Father, whose existence preceded His own. Gregory’s own creed is firmly set out in the Preface to *DLH* Book I. Adhering to the canons of the Council of Nicaea 325, he states that

*Credo, hanc Trinitatem sanctam in distinctione subsistere personarum, et aliam quidem personam Patris, aliam Fili, aliam Spiritus sancti. In qua Trinitate unam Deitatem, unam potentiam, unam essentiam esse, confiteor.*⁴

The bishops at Nicaea established an enduring definition of orthodoxy, and with the same stroke designated all expositions of the Trinity which fell outwith this as heresy. It was at Nicaea that the bishop Arius, from whom Arianism takes its name, was condemned.

⁴ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 4.11-13. “I believe that this holy Trinity subsists in the distinction of persons, so that one person is the Father, another is the Son, and another the Holy Spirit. And in this Trinity I confess one Deity, one power, and one essence.”

However, Arianism does not appear in the *DLH* until II.2. Here, the Vandal Trasamund (†523) is presented as a brutally violent persecutor of Catholic Christians in Spain, whose attempts to convert one young woman are described in detail as they escalate, from encouragement, via threats, to barbarous torture.⁵ There follow further accounts of persecutions of Catholics by Arians; bishops as well as kings are named as perpetrators.⁶ Other scholars have raised doubts about the veracity of some of these accounts,⁷ which have been designed, I suggest, to create a forceful image of Arianism as a genuine menace to true believers.⁸

Gregory spends the preface to Book III highlighting the diverging fates of Arians and Catholics, and again states his own Nicæan creed.⁹ One of the condemned Arians was Arius himself, whose contemptible death resonates through many of Arianism's further appearances in the *DLH*.¹⁰ The remainder of Book III offers numerous examples

⁵ *DLH* II.2.

⁶ *DLH* II.3, 4, 25. The heretical bishop was Cyrola, who tormented the saintly bishop Eugenius, and then staged a miracle-working contest with him, which he naturally lost.

⁷ Goffart, *Narrators* 215-6; Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis" 78.

⁸ Further linking Arianism with harassment of true believers is the story of Sidonius Apollinaris, who was threatened by two rebellious priests. The next morning one of the priests, still full of spite towards the holy man, went to the toilet, where he is reputed to have died while sitting on the lavatory. Gregory explicitly links his fate to that of Arius, and points out that [*u*]nde indubitatum est, non minoris criminis hunc reum esse quam Arrium illum (*DLH* II.23, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 68.15-16). "And so it is undoubted, he was guilty of no less a crime than Arius."

⁹ *Nos vero unum atque invisibilem et immensum, inconpraehensibilem, inclitum, perennem atque perpetuum Dominum confitemur, unum in Trinitate propter personarum numerum, id est Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti; confitemur et trinum in unitate propter aequalitatem substantiae, deitatis, omnipotentiae vel virtutis; qui est unus summus atque omnipotens Deus in sempiterna saecula regnans* (*DLH* III.Pref., *MGH SSRM* I.1, 97.9-13). "But we confess the Lord one and invisible and immense, incomprehensible, glorious, perpetual and for ever, one in three persons on account of the Trinity, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit We confess Him three in unity, because of equality of substance, of godhead, power and omnipotence, who is one God, Almighty and on high, reigning world without end."

¹⁰ *Arrius enim, qui huius iniquae sectae primus iniquosque inventur fuit, interiora in secessum deposita, infernalibus igneibus subditur* (*DLH* III.Pref., *MGH SSRM* I.1, 96.18-19 - 97.1). "For Arius, who was the wicked first of this iniquitous sect, losing his insides in the lavatory, was delivered to the fires of hell."

which give the proof to his assertion that, while Clovis, *rex confessus, ipsus hereticos adiuturium eius oppraesset regnumque suum per totas Gallias dilatavit*,¹¹ the failures of heretics can be attributed to their refusal to accept the Trinity. For Clovis, success is not only a matter of adopting the correct dogma, but battling against the wrong one. Ian Wood has highlighted the extent to which Gregory distorted the events of Clovis's reign to make it appear as though much of the king's warmongering was motivated by religious fervour against a demonized enemy.¹² Gregory's presentation allows for Clovis's motivations to be held up in glowing contrast to those of his grandsons, the kings of the 560s – 590s, who were Gregory's contemporaries, and who were apparently unconcerned about any threat from heresy. The fates of Clovis' Arian enemies serve as a warning, particularly for King Chilperic, about whose orthodoxy I believe Gregory felt himself to have particular cause for concern.

Arianism has been more or less central to debates surrounding the purpose of the *DLH* for some time. Raymond Van Dam sees Gregory's stance towards Arianism as "reactionary", suggesting that a major element of Gregory's concern with the doctrine was that, in denying the equality of the Son to the Father, it also denied the power of miracles. As much of Gregory's own power rested on the continued manifestation of the miracles of St. Martin, this was understandably extremely threatening.¹³ However, it has

¹¹ *DLH* III.Pref., *MGH SSRM* I.1, 97.3-4. "Clovis, who confessed [the Trinity], with its help overcame the heretics, and enlarged his kingdom over all of Gaul".

¹² One of the examples given by Ian Wood is the fabrication of a family connection between the Burgundian king Gundioc, father of the Burgundians who were contemporaries of Clovis, and the fourth-century Gothic king Athanaric, known as a persecutor of Christians ("Gregory of Tours and Clovis" 78). This family connection suggests a connection in temperament which explains the fratricidal and treacherous behaviour of Gundioc's sons and Clovis's subsequent treatment of them.

¹³ Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 107.

not escaped the attention of historians that the heresy appears to preoccupy Gregory to an extent hardly merited by the small threat it posed to orthodoxy in his time. Walter Goffart noted for example that the Goths of Spain were “more threatened in their Arianism than threatening to the Catholics north of their borders.”¹⁴ Indeed, Gregory’s dispute with the Arian Agilan in V.43 reveals a toleration in some Arians for the other religion, which was not reciprocated.¹⁵ In *Culture and religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481-751*, Yitzak Hen states that “[n]o act of religious intolerance is known to us as committed by Arians against Catholics in Gaul.”¹⁶

Tours was, however, on the main road south into Spain,¹⁷ giving ample opportunity for gathering information from and about the Arian Visigoths, as well as rhetorical scope for Gregory to compare them with the Catholics of Gaul. One of these episodes is laid out for us in the aforementioned conversation between Gregory and

¹⁴ “Gregory had resided since birth in a land safe for Catholics, in which even a memory of persecution at the hands of heretics would not easily have been come by, except in written form (W. Goffart, *Narrators* 214-5). See also Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours* 126.

¹⁵ To Gregory’s criticisms, Agilan replies: *‘Legem, quam non colis, blasphemare noli; nos vero quae creditis etsi non credimus, non tamen blasphemamus, quia non deputatur crimine, si et illa et illa colantur. Sic enim vulgato sermone dicimus, non esse noxium, si inter gentilium aras et Dei ecclesiam quis transiens utraque veneretur’* (DLH V.43, MGH SSRM I.1, 251.19-20, 252.1-2). “Do not blaspheme a faith which you yourself do not believe. We do not believe that which you do, but even if we do not believe, we do not blaspheme against it, for it is not counted as a crime, to worship this or that. For we have a common saying that if one is passing between the altars of the church of the Gentiles and the church of God, it is not harmful to show honour to both.” The rigid refusal to acknowledge any other deity appears to have been a characteristic of Christianity almost from its inception. That Christians in the first three centuries A.D. declined go through the motions of showing respect for the pagan gods of the Empire was one of the main reasons why they were persecuted (see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, “Why were the early Christians persecuted?”, *P&P* 26.1 (1963) 24).

¹⁶ (Brill, 1995) 14. Although Gregory suggests differently in DLH II.25, where he talks [d]e *Eparchio persecutore* (MGH SSRM I.1 35.17).

¹⁷ Anthony Cohen suggests that attachment to identity is never stronger than at a boundary between two groups (*The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1989) 12 ff.).

Agilan, an envoy from Leovigild to Chilperic.¹⁸ Proximity and opportunity cannot, however, be the whole story.

Goffart suggests that Gregory's concern was to stir the religious fervour of a population for whom orthodoxy had become so unquestioned that it no longer mattered.¹⁹ Thus the heresy had to be presented as an ever-present threat, in order to demonstrate the need for the Catholic church to remain constantly vigilant against violation from outside forces. Kathleen Mitchell has argued that Eusebius, one of Gregory's great influences, seemed to relish the rise of heresy in his own time as an opportunity to redefine orthodoxy.²⁰ Gregory, she suggests, followed his example. Likewise, Avril Keely sees Gregory's Arians as "agents of differentiation", against which the orthodox could be measured,²¹ pointing out that Gregory's attention to Arians was not merited by conditions at the time.²² Thus the crux of the aforementioned debate between Gregory and Agilan is

¹⁸ Sent, most likely, to begin marriage negotiations between Leovigild's son Reccarred and one of Chilperic's daughters, as things were turning rather sour with Ingund and Hermenegild and consequently also with the Austrasian court.

¹⁹ *Narrators* 214.

²⁰ Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 25. For Eusebius, "[t]he orthodox identity of the church [...] was demonstrated in the *Historia ecclesiastica* in terms of the great antiquity of its beliefs, the resolve of its leaders against the onslaught of error, and the courage of its followers to defend it, when necessary, with their lives" (Ibid. 27). Thus persecutions also presented a vital opportunity, as they "inspired great courage in Christians as well as [being] tremendous witness to the truth of the gospel" (Ibid. 34). A survey of the use of the word *persecutio/persecutionem* in the *DLH* reveals that Gregory only employs the word as a noun. People do not persecute nor are persecuted: persecutions are special historical events that allow the faithful to prove themselves against false believers.

²¹ "Arians and Jews in the *DLH* of Gregory of Tours", *JMH* vol. 23.2 (1997) 103-115.

²² Ibid. 104. Keely suggests that Gregory uses Arians and Jews in a similar way, "to sharpen the self-identity of the Christians of sixth-century Gaul" (103). However, as women do not appear to feature so prominently in anecdotes about Jews, a difference in purpose must be considered. While a full investigation to this end is beyond the scope of the present study, it might be remarked that heresy is defined as "ideas new to Christianity; the orthodox were those beliefs which had always been held" (Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 20, and cf., R. L. P. Milburn, *Early Christian Interpretations of History* (London, 1954) 35-36). Hence heresy was a straying away from correct doctrine, and a faithless woman a logical vehicle for the

not simply Gregory's trouncing of the other man in religious debate, but the use of Agilan's beliefs as a counterpoint to his own. Gregory was in fact no great theologian, and the debate is inconclusive. The definition of correct belief was however meaningless without some notion of the point at which beliefs strayed into the territory of the incorrect. Taking Gregory's encounter with Agilan alongside Chilperic's attempts, described in the next chapter, to provide a simplified definition of the Trinity, Heinzelmann states that, as Gregory perceived the king's role to be "defender of orthodoxy", we must therefore understand by the juxtaposition of these two chapters that "Arianism was the yardstick by which to judge the correct behaviour of the Christian king."²³

Gisèle de Nie notes that Gregory repeatedly associates Arianism with poison and defilement, in his *Miracula* as well as in the *DLH*.²⁴ The fate of Arius, the religion's founder,²⁵ who allegedly died when he suffered some sort of haemorrhage while on a toilet, is mentioned on several occasions.²⁶ It was a fate which would condemn his followers to be forever associated in the eyes of orthodox Catholics with pollution and foulness. The two religions are juxtaposed, with Catholicism as defined and inviolable,

expression of such ideas. Judaism predated Christianity, and so could not reasonably be represented in the same way.

²³ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 156.

²⁴ G. de Nie, "The Body, Fluidity and Personal Identity in the World of Gregory of Tours", in her *Word, Image and Experience. Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul* (Aldershot, 2003) 2: Gregory's "visceral hatred of heretics appears in his repeatedly associating them with excrements."

²⁵ Though Arius gave the heresy its name, he had in fact been largely sidelined by more powerful players by the time of his death. However, because his views had been officially condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325, his name was thereafter tainted, and association with his name became an "invaluable polemical tool" with which to discredit an opponent (M. F. Wiles, *Archetypal heresy: Arianism through the centuries* (Oxford, 1996) 6.

²⁶ *DLH* II.23, III.Pref, V.43, IX.15.

and Arianism as ambiguous, porous, and contaminated.²⁷ De Nie has found in Gregory's works various conceptions of the Mother Church as inviolable entity, which protected the faithful from 'the turbulent water of the earthly life',²⁸ the filth and disorder of which Arianism was a part.

I propose that much of Gregory's thinking on the subject of heresy remains obscure without the focus that a gendered perspective brings to bear. Despite noting an appearance in *DLH* II.21 of the Devil disguised as a bejewelled woman,²⁹ and her earlier statement that "it is the Devil who suggests and maintains the heretics' false doctrines",³⁰ de Nie's analysis does not consider the connection between heresy and gender. Nor do any of the other analyses which have pondered Arianism's role in the *DLH*. It is, however, through the female characters in the *DLH* that ideas on heresy and orthodoxy are most fully articulated. These characters allow Gregory to explore anxieties about the boundaries of Catholicism, set against ever-mutable outside pressures, including Arianism. The ideas of Mary Douglas in her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* are crucial here. The human body, male or female, is a microcosm of society, each person a discrete entity. "[a]ny structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its

²⁷ This distinction helps to explain the efficacy of Catholic miracles. The correct faith gives the holy man a spiritual wholeness, which allows for the reception and retention of the Holy Spirit. The holy man is able to channel this to heal others, and to perform other miraculous acts. The Arian "holy man", on the other hand, though he may be willing to receive the Spirit, tries in vain to perform miracles. See the spiritual contests in *DLH* II.3, *GM* 80, 81 and *GC* 13. Cf. de Nie, "The Body" 11-12.

²⁸ *In psalterii tractatum commentarius*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 875, trans. de Nie, "The Body." 10-11.

²⁹ De Nie, "The Body" 8-9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6

specially vulnerable points.”³¹ Matter passing through the boundaries of the body must be carefully regulated, as such transactions risk the integrity of the society itself. Like the church, each individual might be regarded as a “vessel which must not pour away or dilute its vital fluids. Females are correctly seen as, literally, the entry by which the pure content may be adulterated. Males are treated as pores through which the precious stuff may ooze out and be lost, the whole system being thereby enfeebled.”³² [...] In a patrilineal system of descent [such as that practised by the Merovingians] wives are the door of entry to the group. [...] Through the adultery of a wife impure blood is introduced to the lineage. So the symbolism of the imperfect vessel weighs more heavily on the women than on the men.”³³ Logically, those concerned with the boundaries of their society, or in this case, with the integrity of their religion, are also concerned with the purity of the females within that society.³⁴

Women and Arianism in Gregory’s *DLH*

There are fourteen episodes in the *DLH* which feature and specifically mention Arians or Arianism, a survey of which reveals that five of them concern women: a

³¹ *Purity and Danger* 150.

³² For an interpretation of the clerical preoccupation with nocturnal emissions which references Douglas’ work, see C. Leyser, “Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emission and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages, in Hadley ed., *Masculinity* 102-120. See also de Nie, “The Body” 11-12. See now Coon, *Dark Age Bodies*, which also makes extensive use of Douglas’ work, and argues that impure speech was also perceived as dangerous.

³³ *Purity and Danger* 156.

³⁴ Women are associated with greater permeability of bodily boundaries. Gale A Yee has pointed out that, as women “reproduce members of ethnic identities”, they “constitute the symbolic boundaries of a people’s identity” (*Poor Banished Children of Eve* 147). Because they can be literally impregnated by men who are not of the right ethnic identity, their capacity to be penetrated makes them the vulnerable frontier at which the boundary of the community can be breached. Childbirth and menstruation also lead to the assumption that a woman’s bodily integrity is more fragile.

significant proportion.³⁵ A sixth incident, which features the experiences of Clovis's daughter Clothild in Spain, does not specifically mention Arianism, but clearly refers to this heresy, and so will also be dealt with in this chapter.³⁶ A seventh features the aforementioned Thuringian royal couple Hermanfrid and Amalaberg.³⁷ Again, Arianism is not specifically mentioned here, but Amalaberg, a niece of Theodoric the Great of Italy, was certainly Arian and possibly converted her husband. In order to examine why Gregory chose to play out his concerns about this aberrant religion through the actions and experiences of women, I will first briefly summarise each episode.

The first episode, featuring a young Catholic noblewoman tortured by the Arian persecutor Trasamund, has already been summarized.³⁸ The second, in *DLH* II.31, tells us of Clovis's sister, Lanthechild, who had "fallen into" the Arian heresy, but who converted to Catholicism shortly after her brother's baptism. With *dilapsa fuerat* Gregory

³⁵ *DLH* II.2, II.31, III.31, IV.27, V.38.

³⁶ *Ibid.* III.10. Another four are disputes between Arian and Catholic bishops, illustrating the superiority of the latter faith (*Ibid.* II.3, II.23, V.43, IX.15). This includes Gregory's own debate with the envoy Agilan (V.43). Two are more or less incidental mentions of the Burgundians as following Arianism, (*Ibid.*, II.9, II.32). Those remaining are an account of the death of Godigisel, which can perhaps be placed in the "disputes with bishops" section, as Godigisel and an Arian bishop take refuge in a church, but are nonetheless killed (*Ibid.* II.33). The presence of the bishop is crucial here, as it allows Gregory to highlight the powerlessness of an Arian bishop even within his own church, where it ought to have been at its most efficacious. *DLH* III.1 is a reminder of the fate of Arius, not made explicit until this point, though he has referred to it in the fate of one of the plotters against Sidonius, (*Ibid.*, II.22) allowing him to argue that the similarity in the two men's fates proves that disobedience to the bishop is tantamount to heresy (see Heinzelmänn, "Heresy in Books I and II of Gregory of Tours' *Historiae*", in A. C. Murray ed., *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History*. Essays presented to Walter Goffart (Toronto, 1998) 67-82). The final episode in the famous decision of Clovis to go to war against the Goths is on the basis that he dislikes Arians holding a part of Gaul (*Ibid.* II.37).

³⁷ *DLH* III.4.

³⁸ See above, 86.

suggests a lapsing into heresy; a falling away from true faith, which had to be maintained with proper vigilance.³⁹

The ordeal of Clovis' daughter Clothild, who was sent to Spain to marry the Arian Visigothic king Amalric, is described in *DLH* III.10. He persecuted her for her refusal to convert to his faith, having her covered with dung and filth as she made her way to church, and beating her so badly that she was able to send a cloth stained with her blood to her brother Childebert as proof of her mistreatment, and to demand his assistance.

The third direct reference to Arianism features the daughter of King Theodoric of Italy,⁴⁰ who when she grew up conducted a shameful affair with a slave, rather than choosing a husband more suited to her station in life.⁴¹ They ran away together, and her horrified mother sent armed men after them, who killed Amalasuntha's lover, beat her and brought her back to her mother's house. Furious at this, Amalasuntha concocted a plan to kill her mother. Gregory lets us know that both lived as members of the Arian "sect", and that it was the aberrant practices of the Arian communion which facilitated Amalasuntha's evil deed. Royalty took communion from one cup while commoners took from another, and so Amalasuntha put poison into her mother's cup. The people of Italy, we are told, were so angry at Amalasuntha's actions that they called in King Theudat of

³⁹ This episode is the least instructive of those featuring women and Arianism, so I will not deal with it further, as it yields little more in the context of this chapter than I have already suggested.

⁴⁰ Amalasuntha's story is told in its entirety in *DLH* III.31.

⁴¹ *Hic autem cum adulta facta esset, per levitatem animi sui, relicto matris consilio, quae ei regis filium providebat, servum suum Traguilanem nomen accepit et cum eum ad civitatem, qua defensare possit, aufugit (MGH SSRM I.1, 126.13-16).* "When she became an adult, her lover's fickleness of mind caused her to ignore the counsel of her mother, who had chosen a king's son for her and, accepting instead her servant Traguilla, fled with him to a city where they would be safe."

Tuscany to rule over them instead. He arranged a suitable punishment for Amalasuntha, ordering her to be shut up in a bathroom: she died from the extreme heat of the vapours therein.

The fourth mention is of the Visigothic princess Brunhild, who came to Gaul in 567 to marry King Sigibert. We are told that she was of the Arian faith, but the preaching of bishops and the requests of her husband converted her, and she remained a Catholic “to this day”.⁴²

The fifth incident involved both a female victim and a female persecutor. In 579, a Merovingian princess - Ingund, the daughter of Sigibert and Brunhild – was sent to the Visigothic kingdom as the bride of an Arian prince, and suffered persecution when she would not convert. Gregory situates her suffering in the wider context of a persecution of all the Christians in Spain. The instigator of this, he tells us, was Ingund’s new mother-in-law Queen Goiswinth, widow of King Athanagild and now wife of King Leovigild.⁴³ As well as being Ingund’s mother-in-law, Goiswinth was also her maternal grandmother, mother of Brunhild.

In the Preface to Book III, Gregory declares that Clovis had enlarged his kingdom specifically by defeating heretics. In the Preface to Book V, Gregory expressly states that Clovis’ success can be attributed to the fact that he had concentrated on foreign wars. Reading the Prefaces together suggests that the Arians of *DLH* III.Pref against whom

⁴² *DLH* IV.27.

⁴³ *DLH* V.38.

Clovis pitted his strength, and the foreigners mentioned in V.Pref, fall into the same category. Gaul is a Catholic country, and Arianism is a religion of foreigners.⁴⁴ Women and Arianism come into conjunction at points where Gregory discusses aspects of nations other than Gaul, whether they be Arian women in Arian countries, Arian women coming to Catholic countries or Catholic women crossing the border in the other direction. Crossing such geographical boundaries often also carries the possibility of contact with a different religion.

The triumph of orthodoxy

Incomer queens

Catholic princesses who travelled to Spain to marry Gothic princes found themselves in a land where theirs was the minority religion. Without the protection of brothers or father, they were vulnerable. Those who held fast to their belief in the face of mounting pressure to change may have been pushing against an established tradition that girls who entered a new family would follow the religion of this new family, leaving the old one behind. Brunhild and Galswinth, both daughters of the Arian Visigothic King Athanagild, came from Spain to marry, respectively, Kings Sigibert and Chilperic. Both marriages took place in 567. Sigibert, having seen his brothers make marriages unworthy of them, wished to marry a princess. Chapter two of the present thesis highlighted Brunhild's virtues, in particular their similarity to those of Clothild.⁴⁵ Brunhild was an

⁴⁴ The concept of the "Christian state" is an idea in which Gregory was influenced by Orosius (see Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 16).

⁴⁵ 58-9.

Arian by birth, but *per praedicationem sacerdotum atque ipsius regis commonitionem*⁴⁶ was enjoined to convert. Gregory alleges that Chilperic's prompt request for the hand of Brunhild's sister was primarily in the spirit of competition with his brother, and that the attraction was largely financial.⁴⁷ When Chilperic grew tired of Galswinth's complaints about the presence of his previous consort, Fredegund, he had the new queen garrotted. We do not know how Galswinth was prevailed upon to convert, but the evidence of a miracle after her murder signalled her acceptance into the heavenly community, and tells us that she must indeed have been a Catholic at the time of her death.⁴⁸

However, even princesses who conformed to their new environment in terms of faith could create tensions. Ian Wood highlights a puzzling reference in the canons of the 567 Council of Tours, which refers to the punishment meted out to the Hebrews for taking foreign wives.⁴⁹ Though it does not appear at first to be strictly relevant to the situation at hand, Wood believes it may be a veiled reference to the trouble stirring in the kingdom since the arrival of Galswinth and Brunhild.⁵⁰ This budding disquiet about the

⁴⁶ *DLH* IV.27, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 160.8-9. "through the preaching of bishops and the admonitions of the king himself".

⁴⁷ *a quo etiam magno amore diligebatur. Detulerat enim secum magnos thesauros* (*DLH* IV.28, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 160.16-17). "He had great love for her, because she had brought great treasure with her."

⁴⁸ *DLH* IV.28.

⁴⁹ "Here the canons come as close as the legislation of any other Frankish council of the period, secular or religious, to identifying the sixth-century population of Merovingian Gaul with the Chosen People" ("Incest, law and the Bible in sixth-century Gaul", *EME* 7 (1998) 295).

⁵⁰ The canon was attempting to deal with the problem of marriage to dedicated religious women rather than foreign wives, so the comparison does not at first appear to be strictly pertinent. Wood suggests that the political climate may have suggested the comparison with the Hebrews (*Ibid.*).

influence of foreign princesses, and the potential pitfalls of intermarriage with heretic nations more generally, would flower in Carolingian writings.⁵¹

Gregory does not appear to share the concerns of the delegates of Tours 567. His acceptance of Galswinth's sanctity suggests that he believed the matter of faith, and of loyalty, to be firmly decided at conversion.⁵² As soon as she became a Catholic, Galswinth effectively became a new person. Baptism represents a rebirth: the new Catholic's previous incarnation is simply that – a previous existence, of no further import. Brunhild was Gregory's patron. This, together with her own conversion, similarly placed her beyond criticism in his eyes. However, Gregory does betray the apprehensions of others about Brunhild's ongoing connections with the Visigothic kingdom, her former home. She maintained these long after Sigibert's death in 575,⁵³ helping to arrange marriages for her two daughters with Visigothic princes.⁵⁴ Guntram appears to have held a profound distrust for the Visigoths, rebuffing their overtures of friendship even after King Reccarred had converted to Catholicism.⁵⁵ This distrust coloured his view of Brunhild's communications with Spain. At one point, he became convinced that an envoy

⁵¹ See W. Pohl, "*Alienigena coniugia*. Bestrebungen zu einem Verbot auswärtiger Heiraten in der Karolingerzeit" in A. Pečar and K. Trampedach eds., *Die Bibel als politisches Argument: Voraussetzungen und Folgen biblizistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in der Vormoderne* (Munich, 2007) 159-188.

⁵² Or at least, his own political allegiances dictated that this was the desirable impression to create. See chapter 4 of this thesis, 138-9.

⁵³ *DLH* IV.51.

⁵⁴ *DLH* V.38, IX.25.

⁵⁵ *DLH* IX.16

sent by Brunhild to the Visigothic kingdom was actually being sent via Spain to the sons of the Pretender Gundovald.⁵⁶

Brunhild's humiliating death in 613, on the orders of Clothar II, the son of her great rival, Fredegund, as represented by Fredegar and by the *LHF*,⁵⁷ is distinctly resonant of the death of Jezebel in II Kings 9.30-7.⁵⁸ Jezebel was the foreign woman *par excellence*, leading her husband into the worship of false foreign gods, a woman who remained a force for division and destruction throughout her life. Might Brunhild's death have been designed to highlight the fact that she, like Jezebel, had been a foreigner? She was accused of the deaths of ten Frankish kings. Clothar II became sole ruler of Gaul after eradicating the remainders of Brunhild's lineage. The utter destruction of her body⁵⁹ seems designed to eliminate all traces of a lineage that had been rendered impure by the foreign, formerly Arian, queen.

⁵⁶ *Non sufficit, o infelicissime hominum, quod inpudico consilio Ballomerem illum, quem Gundovaldum vocitatis, ad coniugium arcessistis, quem manus mea subegit, qui voluit ditioni suae regni nostri superare potentiam; et nunc filiis eius munera mittitis, ut ipse iterum in Galliis provocetis ad iugulandum?* DLH IX.28 (MGH SSRM I.1, 447.3-6). Gregory lets us know that he found this idea preposterous. "Is it not enough, most miserable of men, that through shameless counsel you invited to wed [Brunhild] the Ballomer, whom you call Gundovald, whom my hand subdued as he wished to overcome and bring under his dominion the government of our kingdom; and now you send gifts to his children, again provoking them to come to Gaul to murder me?"

⁵⁷ Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicitur Fredegarii scholastici libri IV cum continuationibus*, B. Krusch (ed.) MGH SSRM II (Hanover, 1888) IV.42, and trans. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, as the *Fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its continuations* (Nelson, 1960); *LHF* ch. 40.

⁵⁸ C.f. J. Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: the Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History", *Medieval Women: Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M.T. Hill on the occasion of her 70th Birthday: Studies in Church History, Subsidia*, I, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978) 40; repr. in Nelson ed., *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986) 213-33, and L. K. Little and B. H. Rosenwein eds., *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford, 1998) 219-253).

⁵⁹ Fredegar reports that, after being dragged through the streets tied to a camel, she was tied to the feet of wild horses and torn apart. The *LHF* relates the final detail that her bones were burnt.

However, these events were beyond Gregory's time, and foreigner queens in Gaul are generally regarded positively in the *DLH*. Clothild is portrayed as having had a key role in the establishment of Catholicism in Gaul, through having helped to persuade Clovis to convert; Radegund, who was raised as a Catholic at her future husband Chlothar I's villa at Athies, likewise receives the highest praise.⁶⁰ Wisigard, a daughter of Wacho, King of the Lombards, is given an entirely neutral treatment. She had been engaged to be married to King Theudebert (†548), who had abandoned plans to marry her after forming a relationship with another woman. Gregory merely reports that the Franks were scandalised by this situation.⁶¹

Princesses who came to Gaul to be married did not present a problem for Gregory. In each case, the woman in question was a positive addition, even if, like Galswinth, her time in her new country was only brief. Clothild was presented as a Catholic proselytizer, while Brunhild and Galswinth both converted readily, persuaded by the simple truth of the Catholic faith as set out before them by willing teachers. We now turn to the other side of this equation, Catholic princesses sent across borders to marry Arian princes.

Catholic princesses abroad

A familiar topos of the period was the opportunity for proselytizing afforded to Catholic princesses who travelled to Arian kingdoms to marry. We know of several

⁶⁰ For the meaning of Radegund's life and example for Gregory, see Smith, "Radegundis peccatrix" 322-3.

⁶¹ *cuniuncti Franci contra eum valde scandalizabantur, quare sponsam suam relinqueret* (*DLH* III.27, *MGH SRM* I.1, 124.4-5). "All the Franks were very offended at him, at the way in which he had left his bride."

princesses who arrived at their new marital home bearing letters from bishops and popes admonishing them to work towards their husbands' conversions to Catholicism.⁶² One wonders just how such attempts would have been received. Clothild the Younger and Ingund perhaps arrived in Spain full of the hope that they might be able to emulate the elder Clothild, only to find that there were those who were just as determined to see them convert.

Despite the encouragement that she received from Pope Gregory the Great,⁶³ Bede does not award much credit to Bertha, the Frankish princess, daughter of King Charibert, who married King Æthelbert of Kent, for the latter's conversion.⁶⁴ Although he tells us that Æthelbert had certainly been made aware of Catholicism, as his wife was a practising Catholic and had imparted "some knowledge" to her husband,⁶⁵ it was only the mission of Augustine from Rome that persuaded him to convert. Janet Nelson suggests that this was because Bede wished to award the credit to Augustine.⁶⁶ This turns the conversion into a tale of understanding reached between men of good sense, with female agency carefully sidelined. However, the fact that Bertha is not given fuller credit should perhaps not surprise us. Even Bertha's great-grandmother Clothild, by this time being held up as an example of a great proselytising queen, is never given full credit for

⁶² Janet Nelson examines a selection of these in "Queens as Converters" 99-103.

⁶³ Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum*.IX.35, *MGH Epist.* I.2, 304-5.

⁶⁴ Although Æthelbert was not an Arian, this example is included because it suggests similar tensions, concerning women crossing boundaries and the divided loyalties they might carry, to those we find when the kingdom entered is an Arian one.

⁶⁵ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Bk. I, ch. 25.

⁶⁶ "Queens as Converters" 101. Nelson offers a slightly more positive spin on Bede's reticence, that he may have wished to disguise a failure on Bertha's part to keep up the religious momentum after an initial success with her husband, so he simply minimised this initial success. Cf. J.T. Schulenberg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago, 1998) 192-3.

her husband's conversion. As we saw in the previous chapter, Clovis required physical evidence of the greater power of Clothild's God before he would abandon those with whom he had grown up.⁶⁷ Æthelbert, like Clovis, may be displaying the proper degree of caution necessary when evaluating the words of a woman, especially a foreign one.

With regard to incomer queens, concerns over gender and foreignness cannot in practice be separated.⁶⁸ Stacey Klein suggests that Bede may have wished to excise the Franks from the account, fearing that for Æthelbert to be perceived as having converted largely as a result of his wife's efforts could be seen as an acknowledgment of Frankish preeminence.⁶⁹ Bertha was seen, inevitably, as carrying with her some of the ambitions of the Frankish kingdoms.⁷⁰ The only subjection that Bede wished to acknowledge was religious subordination to the Holy See. That such a factor may still have been of concern to Bede, possibly as much as 150 years after the events he was describing actually took place, suggests that the feelings of unease surrounding the figure of an incoming queen could be long-lasting.

Caution is needed when evaluating the invective that attached itself to the often-scapegoated incomer queen.⁷¹ The foreign bride, with her divided allegiances, was an obvious figure of suspicion when tensions were raised. However, women were not mere pawns in the power play between nations. As suggested above, Gregory viewed

⁶⁷ See above, 61.

⁶⁸ Cf. Klein, *Ruling Women* 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 25-27.

⁷⁰ See Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 176.

⁷¹ Cf. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 25-6.

Amalaberg's wicked ambitions as being primarily a function of her Arianism.⁷² Were they also, however, related to her imperial heritage? As the niece of Theodoric the Great, the encouragement of her husband's expansionist ambitions may have been a part of her remit when she was sent to Thuringia as Hermanfrid's wife.⁷³ More simply, she may have felt that a husband who only possessed half of Thuringia was not worthy of the niece of Theodoric.⁷⁴ Women might thus consciously manipulate existing tensions to further the ambitions of their natal kin. Clothild the Younger, sent to Spain to marry the Arian Visigothic prince Amalric, suffered ill-treatment at his hands: Gregory has no hesitation in naming religious difference as the cause of their difficulties. Clothild's reaction to her husband's behaviour is striking. She dramatically reactivated her connection with her family by sending her brother Childebert a towel smeared with her own blood. More than simply proof of her suffering, the blood on the towel was that which she shared with Childebert, and was thus a graphic reminder of his obligation to her.⁷⁵ It also provided ample justification for Childebert's lucrative Spanish intervention in 531.⁷⁶

The first part of this chapter has highlighted the pressures facing young women who crossed boundaries to marry foreign princes, and the anxiety that they could attract.

⁷² *DLH* III.4.

⁷³ Nelson, "Gendering courts" 186-7.

⁷⁴ Tensions surrounding Theodoric's legacy may also have come into play in the Burgundian kingdom. The second wife of Sigismund of Burgundy, also introduced in the first chapter of the current thesis, hinted that her stepson Sigeric, Sigismund's son, had ambitions to overthrow his father and extend his reach to Italy (*DLH* III.5). Sigismund's readiness to believe his wife and dispose of his son is perhaps not inexplicable, given that the boy's mother, Ariagna, was the daughter of Theodoric the Great. An ambition to rule the kingdom once possessed by his grandfather would not have been entirely unrealistic (cf. I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 53).

⁷⁵ *DLH* III.10

⁷⁶ c. 531. He rescued Clothild, but she died on the journey home. He did, however, manage to make off with a good deal of treasure (*DLH* III.10).

Fears about their divided loyalties were not simply projected onto them: princesses often maintained strong links with home, and seem in some cases to have privileged these links over any concerns about the suspicion they may arouse amongst their marital kin. In the examples given above, problems often, but not always, crystallized around the subject of religion, as the young woman's birth religion frequently differed from that of her husband. For Gregory, this was always the crux of the matter. Arians were simply not to be trusted, and where no common ground could be found in religious terms, no point of reconciliation could be reached.

In the next section, we look first at the very overt connection made by Gregory between Arianism and pollution. We then turn, via a brief survey of the Old Testament and Christian patristic background, to a more nuanced interpretation of the symbolic use made by Gregory of the interplay between gender and orthodoxy / heresy.

Woman as symbol

Women, heresy and pollution

For Gregory, Clothild the Younger's stained towel must have been an eloquent signifier of the perilous spiritual danger that the princess was in. She was in a foreign nation, under violent pressure from a heretic to convert to his erroneous beliefs: the sullied towel was a warning of Clothild's own proximity to contamination. Note also that Amalric's weapons of choice before he resorted to physical harm were dirt and dung.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Blood, dung and dirt are all substances which have breached the boundaries which should have contained them. Blood and dung have obviously breached the boundaries of a body, but dirt is also "matter out of place" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 44).

He intended to humiliate her, but for Gregory this was simply an outward manifestation of his intention to infect her with the filth of his belief.⁷⁸

As discussed above, when the Arians led by Trasamund attempted to forcibly baptise a young noblewoman in *DLH* II.2, her menstrual blood stained the water. Evidently, this had some kind of polluting effect which rendered the attempted baptism futile. Baptism was intended as the point of entry into a new faith, and can be understood as the beginning of a new life. In contrast, menstruation is viewed by some societies as representing the failure of a life.⁷⁹ The fortuitous onset of the young woman's menses could therefore be viewed as representing the failure of this act of baptism.⁸⁰ When Trasamund first tried to entice the young noblewoman to be rebaptised, "she turned his poisoned dart with the shield of faith". The font they eventually force her into is the "font of foulness". Gregory is not concerned with the woman's impurity in this condition – he appears to be uninterested in ritual impurity generally. What the woman's blood has done is to expose the uncleanness of the Arian belief itself.

Gregory hammers home his message with a lesson on the improper activities of Arians at communion. There is no eternal life on offer here from the saving body and

⁷⁸ Note however that Gregory makes no mention of the holy church itself being subject to attack. The fact that the church was allowed to exist tells us that Catholics in Spain were not so poorly treated as he would have us believe (see E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, 1969) 31-3).

⁷⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 119.

⁸⁰ The importance of menstrual blood is highlighted by Charlotte Fonrobert, discussing the gospel story of the woman with a flow of blood who touched Jesus's garment and was healed (Mark 5:25-34, Matthew 9:20-22, Luke 8:42-48). Jesus became aware of the woman's presence when he felt his power go out of him. Fonrobert suggests that Jesus had not simply felt the power leave him that was necessary to heal the woman, but that the woman, due to her menstruation, had caused some kind of draining effect (C. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, 2000) 188).

blood of Christ – to drink from the cup of this communion means only death, as illustrated by the immediate death of Amalasuntha's mother.⁸¹ The Arians' wrongful belief has allowed the Devil to be present at the very act of communion, while their perversion of the Eucharist has facilitated Amalasuntha's plans in a very practical way, allowing her to target only her mother with the poison. The communion cup of course represents the blood of Christ, but in the Arian ritual, where different classes of person drink from different cups, the wine in the cup, rather than associating itself with the purifying blood of Christ, retains the polluting qualities of ordinary blood. Women, heresy and defilement are readily associated in the *DLH*.

The Old Testament context.

It is now generally accepted that Gregory drew heavily on the Bible for stylistic inspiration. This is particularly true of his creation of character and moral priorities, as was convincingly demonstrated by Martin Heinzelmann.⁸² However, the debt Gregory owed to the Bible for the creation of his female characters is a topic that remains all but untouched. This is despite the fact that women are essential to the thought-world of many of the Bible's books, and to much work by early Christian writers, some of whom Gregory mentions as having influenced him directly.⁸³

⁸¹ See above, 94.

⁸² *Gregory of Tours* 43, 51-9, 92-3, 105, 127-8.

⁸³ In the General Preface, he lists Eusebius, Jerome, Orosius and Victorius, and mentions following their example to give a reckoning of years from the Creation down to the present day. In the Preface to Book II, he once again mentions Eusebius and Jerome, and adds Sulpicius Severus.

Feminist Biblical scholarship can provide some illuminating insights into the ways in which women – their words, as we saw in the previous chapter, but also their bodies – are symbolically deployed in order to articulate other ideas. In the books of the prophets Hosea, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the promiscuous woman is used again and again as a metaphor for a straying away from the proper faith. Thus, for example, in the book of Hosea, the prophet uses his own marriage to a faithless woman as an analogy for the relationship between God and Israel. Like Hosea’s wife, Israel has strayed away from the covenant she shared with her partner. Thus, a religious transgression is framed as a sexual one, and the body of a woman stands for the Israelite nation as a whole.⁸⁴ Ezekiel uses the female body in a similar way, this time personifying the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem as whorish sisters.⁸⁵ God punishes such faithlessness by allowing the Hebrews to be conquered by their enemies. This domination is often phrased in sexualised terms.⁸⁶ In this way, the prophets articulate the concern that a perceived failure to follow the correct tenets of their faith will lead to the Hebrews being defeated by their enemies. The

⁸⁴ In *The Great Code*, Northrop Frye notes that “The word “whoredom” in the Bible usually refers to theological rather than sexual irregularity” (160). He does not note the gender assumptions inherent in the choice of word. Renita J. Weems discusses the usefulness of the marriage analogy to the Hebrew prophets, arguing that the marriage relationship was one which, like that envisaged between God and the people of Israel, “where issues of power, propriety, property, and purity were at stake”, and which also had the “power to evoke strong feelings of shame and remorse” (*Battered Love: Marriage, Sex and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, 1995) 13-14). It also evoked a great difference in power between two partners: which allowed the more powerful partner to make demands of the less so and to punish her if she did not live up to these (75).

⁸⁵ In Israelite society, intercourse with inappropriate people threatened to blur the ancestral and property lines which distinguished patriarchal households, and also called into question the husband or father’s ability to control the sexual impulses of women under his authority (Weems, *Battered Love* 4). H. C. Washington argues that “Concern about things entering and exiting the body, foods, excretions and secretions, signify anxiety about the boundaries of a society”, (“Israel’s Holy Seed and the Foreign Woman of Ezra-Nehemiah: a Kristevan Reading”, *Biblical Interpretation: a journal of contemporary approaches* vol. 11 (2003) 432), and points out that “The cross-cultural prevalence of menstrual exclusions, for example, corresponds to the subordination of the feminine in many societies.”

⁸⁶ For example, in Hosea 2.3: “Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born: and I will make her as a wilderness, and will set her as a land that none can pass through, and will kill her with drought.”

doctrinal “looseness” of idolatry is imagined as the loose sexual morals of women whose sexual behaviour ought to have been carefully regulated. Mary Douglas highlights the fact that “[t]he Israelites were always in their history a hard-pressed minority”,⁸⁷ making domination by others a very real possibility.

The violation of individual women also expresses societal disorder. When Dinah is raped in Genesis 34, the crime is viewed as having been committed against the community as a whole: thus she expresses Israel’s vulnerability to domination by other peoples.⁸⁸ The most graphic example of such a use of an individual woman’s body is found in Judges 19. Here, a Levite staying overnight in the settlement of Gibeath, in the land of the tribe of Benjamin, takes his concubine, who had been raped and beaten by a mob of Benjaminites, and cuts her into twelve pieces. Each of these is sent to one of the twelve Israelite tribes as a call to war. The other Israelite tribes banded together and made war on the tribe of Benjamin, seeking vengeance for the woman’s violation. The woman’s body was used to incite the other tribes, as it provided proof of the insult done to the Levite’s own tribe, but subsequently it became, in its divided state, a symbol of the civil war itself.⁸⁹ Each piece of her body now represented one of the tribes of Israel, once a coherent whole but now sundered by war because of the abhorrent act of one of the tribes.

⁸⁷ *Purity and Danger* 153.

⁸⁸ “Israel imagines itself as a woman violated as a way of speaking of its struggle to retain a distinctive and separate cultural identity” (S. B. Thistlethwaite, “You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies” Rape as a Biblical Metaphor for War”, *Semeia* (1993) 84).

⁸⁹ Thistlethwaite, “You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies” 85. See also P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*: the rape of the concubine reflects a time when there was chaos among the tribes of Israel, with no strong leadership and few appearances by God (65).

Elsewhere, the figure of an individual foreign female is often used to express fears about “outsider” religion. Such women might entice Israelite men away from the proper faith. This concern is expressed in Deuteronomy 7:1-5, and stories illustrating a similar unease can be found in Numbers 25:15, in which the Moabite women lure Israelite men away from their faith, and in I Kings 11:1-8, in which the religious apostasy of King Solomon’s reign is blamed on the foreign wives who influenced him to follow other gods. Ahab turned to Baal because of the influence of Jezebel, his wife. (I Kings 16:31).⁹⁰ Female figures were of great symbolic vitality for many Old Testament writers. Clearly, this fact deserves some consideration when analyzing texts which, like the *DLH*, drew extensively on the Bible for inspiration. We turn now to look briefly at the ways in which patristic writers used and developed such ideas.

Early Christian uses of the female body.

Early Christian literature draws on Biblical uses of the female, but with an increasingly triumphant edge befitting Christianity’s status, after the conversion of Constantine, as the religion of Empire. The martyr was the champion of this “winning” orthodoxy, and the suffering of female virgin martyrs is often depicted in particularly graphic terms.⁹¹ Eusebius devoted a good deal of attention to female martyrs in his *Ecclesiastical History*, including several passages in which sexual threat is overt.⁹² The

⁹⁰ Cf. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader* 71-3. See also Yee: foreign women in the Bible are “incarnations of sexual danger and destruction in the piety and lives of Israelite males” (*Poor Banished Children of Eve* 2).

⁹¹ Drawing examples from a much broader period, E. V. Vitz highlights the desirability of young female martyrs, who are often depicted as being very attractive and of noble birth (“Gender and Martyrdom”, *MH* n.s. 26 (1999) 80.

⁹² Including that of Potamiaena, a beautiful virgin who is threatened with rape by gladiators (*H.E.* 6.5. 3-4), martyrs at Thebaid (*H.E.* 8.9.1), and a mother and her daughters who drowned themselves rather than be raped by the soldiers who were to take them to trial (*H.E.* 8.12.3). Cf. E. Clark, “Eusebius on Women in

suffering and martyrdoms of women helped Eusebius to illustrate “Christianity’s glorious triumph over both paganism and heresy,”⁹³ the fragility of their bodies expressing with particular eloquence the fact that Christ’s promise could fortify even “things which appear mean and obscure and despicable to men.”⁹⁴ The treatise *On virgins*, written by Ambrose of Milan (†397), describes the suffering of the young virgin martyr Agnes, whose faith withstands torture and execution. The executioner with his sword is presented as a sexual threat, but “threat of penetration is juxtaposed with the insistence on ultimate impenetrability.”⁹⁵ The writers used the virginal female body as a symbol for the integrity of the orthodox church, as it faced challenges from pagans and heretics, while the same time suggesting powerful models for the lives of ascetic women, whose support they required.⁹⁶ The intactness of the virgin’s body could be understood as representing the intactness of the church itself,⁹⁷ their bodily fragility now a cause for celebration, not lamentation.

Early Church History”, in H. W. Attridge and G. Hata eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (New York, 1992) 257-9.

⁹³ Clark, “Eusebius on Women” 256.

⁹⁴ I Corinthians 1.28, and cf. Clark, “Eusebius on Women” 257.

⁹⁵ V. Burrus, “Word and Flesh: the Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity” *JFSR* 10 (1994) 29. See also G. Clark, “Bodies and Blood: Late Antique debate on martyrdom, virginity and resurrection”, in d. Monserrat ed., *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London, 1998) 106-8. In the *Peristephanon* of Prudentius, Agnes is imagined as welcoming her executioner in the language of a lover, who will free her from earthly toil (Ibid. 104, *Pe.* xiv 69-80).

⁹⁶ Burrus, “Word and Flesh” 39. Burrus indicates that virginity first became of concern to Christian writers in the fourth century, at the same time as Arianism first began to spread. She points out that the writers who discussed virginity were in some cases being challenged for control of an episcopal see by Arian contenders.

⁹⁷ V. Burrus, “The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome”, *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 84 (1991) 232, with ref. to Brown, *The Body and Society* 259-84, 341-65. This idea will be explored more fully in the final chapter of this thesis.

In contrast to the inviolability of the Catholic church, the doctrinal looseness of Arianism could be represented by the sexual immorality of a woman, whose wanton behaviour threatened the boundaries of her community. Tertullian (†c.220) was alert to the dangers of female influence.⁹⁸ In his *De praescriptione haereticorum*, he also obliquely linked heresy to both idolatry as described in the Old Testament, and to women, saying to those who would express surprise at men of faith being led so easily into heretical beliefs:

Solomon, whom the Lord had endowed with all grace and wisdom, was
led by women into idolatry.⁹⁹

In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though there are few specific mentions of women heretics, Eusebius implied that the sexual irregularity of women was a not uncommon feature of life within such sects;¹⁰⁰ an inevitable result of allowing women such a prominent role.¹⁰¹ Virginia Burrus examines the development of the association between women and heresy over the course of the fourth century. Burrus' interpretation of the female heretic is worth quoting at some length:

..the fourth-century figure of the heretical woman, who is almost
invariably identified as sexually promiscuous, expresses the threatening
image of a community with uncontrolled boundaries. Just as she allows
herself to be penetrated sexually by strange men, so too she listens
indiscriminately and babbles forth new theological formulations

⁹⁸ In *De culta feminarum* he reminds women that [*t*]u es diaboli ianua. (I.1 – viewed online at the Tertullian Project (http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_cultu_feminarum.htm)).

⁹⁹ *De praescriptione haereticorum* 3, trans. S. L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, Library of Christian Classica V (1956) 32.

¹⁰⁰ *HE* 13.2.4, 3.29.1-4, 4.11.5.

¹⁰¹ For example, as prophetesses within the sect of Montanism (*HE* 4.27).

carelessly and without restraint: all the gateways of her body are unguarded. She furthermore ignores both woman's physical restriction to the private sphere of men; the heretical woman is a wanderer [...] and she is notoriously indifferent to the authority of her male superiors.¹⁰²

We will see many traces of this in the female heretics described by Gregory of Tours. Alexander of Alexandria was a contemporary and opponent of Arius, and discredited him by associating him with women, and with women's disorderly behaviour. Alexander's successor, Athanasius, who wrote some twenty years after the Council of Nicaea,¹⁰³ went rather further in personifying Arianism as a woman.¹⁰⁴ By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, when Jerome was producing his œuvre, "the heretical harlot was a well-established figure in Christian rhetoric."¹⁰⁵ It was a rhetorical strategy that was also available to Gregory of Tours, and of which he made very effective use.

The following section offers an examination of the symbolic significance of women who appear in the *DLH* in conjunction with passages concerning orthodoxy and heresy. But firstly, I examine two apparently obscure episodes in the *DLH* which deal with the spread of Merovingian rule. These highlight Gregory's skill in deploying the image of the female body to express ideas about the boundaries of community. I will then

¹⁰² "The Heretical Woman" 232.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 238.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 231-2. For example, in the *Discourses of Saint Athanasius Against the Arians*, we are told that "she [Arianism] hath already seduced certain of the foolish, not only to corrupt their ears, but even to take and eat with Eve" (Introduction to 1st Discourse, in *Saint Athanasius, Orations Against the Arians*, ed. by members of the English Church (Oxford, 1877) 178). She also "affects to array herself in Scripture language", draping herself as would a woman intent on seduction. Athanasius had the same concern as Gregory, that people may be unclear as to the difference between Arianism and the Truth, and to alleviate this he seeks to establish clear boundaries (Ibid.188).

¹⁰⁵ Burrus, "The Heretical Woman" 245.

re-examine Gregory's account of the Catholic princesses who went to Spain, and demonstrate that Gregory is presenting them as microcosms of the Catholic community in order to express his fears about a threat to the orthodoxy of Gaul. Lastly, an analysis of Gregory's female heretics is offered.

The Body as Community in the *DLH*

In *DLH* III.7, King Theuderic (†534), prior to avenging himself against Hermanfrid, King of the Thuringians, for a previous insult, stirs up the Franks by telling them of the fate suffered by young men and women at the Thuringians' hands during a previous attack on Frankish lands. The fate of the young men is briefly described, while that of the young women is lingered over in some detail:

*'...recolite, Thoringus quondam super parentes nostros violenter advenisse ac multa illis intulisse mala. Qui, datis obsidibus, pacem cum his inire voluerunt, sed ille obsedes ipsus diversis mortibus peremerunt et inruentes super parentes nostros, omnem substantiam abstullerunt, pueros per nervos femorum ad arbores appendentes, puellas amplius ducentas crudeli nece interfecerunt, ita ut, legatis brachiis super equorum cervicibus, ipsique acerrimo moti stimulo per diversa petentes, diversis in partibus feminas diviserunt. Aliis vero super urbitas viarum extensis, sudibusque in terra confixis, plaustra desuper onerata transire fecerunt, confractisque ossibus, canibus avibusque eas in cibaria dederunt.'*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 103.1 – 104.1-9. “Remember, Thuringians in the past fell violently upon our fathers, and did them great evil. Our people gave hostages, and wished to enter into a peace with them, but [the Thuringians] put the hostages to death in many different ways. They then rushed in on our people, stealing all their goods, and hung the boys on the trees by the sinews of their thighs. More than two hundred girls

Clearly, the description of the torture suffered by the young women was expected to elicit a particularly robust response from the listening Franks. This is not simply because the perceived fragility of the female form made the girls' plight especially piteous: their broken and mutilated bodies represent the broken boundaries of the Frankish lands, violated during the Thuringian invasion. Gregory asserts that these were *puellas*, and therefore probably virgins, thus intensifying the gravity of the breach of their bodily boundaries, and thus the insult to Francia itself. The anecdote plays on assumptions about gender difference: women are vulnerable, requiring protection from the stronger, warlike male.¹⁰⁷ This tale, which bears a resemblance to that of the Levite's concubine,¹⁰⁸ legitimises the subsequent actions of the Franks by presenting their opponents as barbarous criminals.

The motif of sexual conquest as territorial conquest appears to form part of the glowing report Gregory gives on King Theudebert (reigned 534-547). In III.22, we find the rather odd story of Deuteria, a resident of the fortress of Cabrières, on which Theuderic, Theudebert's father, had designs. This fortress had been part of the territory taken from the Goths by Clovis, but since his death the Goths had managed to reclaim it. In 533, Theuderic sent his son to take it back. Theudebert sent a message to Cabrières,

were killed by a cruel death; they tied their arms around the necks of horses, which, provoked by a sharp sting, ran in different directions, tearing the young women into pieces. Others they stretched out on the roads, fixed on the earth by stakes, then had loaded wagons driven over them, breaking their bones, and gave their bodies as food to birds and dogs.”

¹⁰⁷ This motif is commonly deployed as part of a call to arms (see Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” 1073).

¹⁰⁸ See above, 104.

saying that '*nisi se ille subdant, omne loco illud incendio concremandum, eosque qui ibidem resedent captivandus.*'¹⁰⁹

He subsequently received a message from Deuteria, inviting him to come and take the town:

*'Nullus tibi, domne piissime, resistere potest. Cognuscemus dominum nostrum; veni et quod bene placitum fuerit in oculis facito.'*¹¹⁰

Theudebert took her at her word, and marched into the town. He encountered no resistance. Deuteria's right to stand for the general opinion of the people is never explained; she has no official title that we hear of, so how are we to interpret this episode? Deuteria's attitude represents the goodwill of the town towards Frankish rule. Once again, her body is vital. She is married, but Theudebert, on coming to Cabrières, quickly beds her. Her willing submission represents that of the town; her faithlessness towards her absent husband stands for the readiness of the townspeople to reject Gothic rule in favour of Frankish. Her adultery is never condemned: indeed she is praised at the beginning of the passage for her energy and wisdom.¹¹¹ To criticise her would be inconsistent with the portrayal of Theudebert. The wisdom of her action, and by implication, of that of the townspeople, is confirmed when, as king, Theudebert *magnum*

¹⁰⁹ *DLH* III.21, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 121.13-14. "...unless they submitted to himself it would be burned to the ground and its residents taken captive."

¹¹⁰ *DLH* III.22, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 122.3-4. "'No-one, most pious prince, has the power to resist you. We recognize you as our lord. Come and do what is good and right in your eyes.'" Her words recall Deuteronomy 7.24: "And he shall deliver their kings into thy hands, and thou shalt destroy their names from under Heaven: no man shall be able to resist thee, until thou destroy them." Theudebert has the blessing and assistance of God in his venture. His widening dominion is divinely ordained, and Deuteria acts as a channel for God's will.

¹¹¹ *utilis valde atque sapiens* (Ibid. 122.1-2).

*se atque in omni bonitate praecipuum reddidit.*¹¹² Again, this story legitimises Frankish hegemony by suggesting that they were welcome conquerors.

It is, however, in relation to the threat of heresy that Gregory's use of the female body as symbol for community is particularly striking. In the battle to define orthodoxy against heresy, Gregory makes use of debate, but actions often speak louder than words.¹¹³ Like his patristic predecessors, Gregory believed the image of the suffering woman to be particularly eloquent. We can recall once more the young woman tortured by Trasamund in *DLH* II.2, who is described as being very wealthy and noble, but distinguished beyond even this by the strength of her Catholic faith.¹¹⁴ When persuasive words have failed to move the young woman to accept Arianism, Trasamund takes away her worldly possessions, and when she is still unmoved he orders her to be *sine spe* [...] *vitae torquiri*,¹¹⁵ before ordering that she be thrown into the Arian baptismal pool. As she is dragged away, she cries out:

¹¹² *DLH* III.25, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 123.14-15. "he showed himself great, and notable in all goodness." The *Miracula* tell a different story. While the *DLH* seem to reflect an enduring loyalty to the kings of Austrasia, which Gregory's family considered home, the *Miracula* reveal a certain fallibility in the king's dealings with the saints. In Gregory's biography of Bishop Nicetius of the Treveri, Theudebert is described as having done "many unjust things," and goes on to tell of an abortive attempt by Theudebert to challenge the bishop's authority (E. James trans., *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers* 107).

¹¹³ For example, the Arian Agilan was not persuaded by Gregory's arguments, but later felt compelled to convert when he fell seriously ill. (*DLH* V.43)

¹¹⁴ *Unde factum est, ut puella quaedam relegiosa, praedives opibus ac secundum saeculi dignitatem nobilitate senatoria florens et, quod his omnibus est nobilius, fide catholica pollens, quae Deo omnipotenti inreprehensibiliter serviebat, ad hac quaestionem adduceretur* (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 39.15-18). "Thus it happened that a pious girl was led to this inquisition. She was very wealthy, and according to worldly distinction belonged to a noble senatorial family. More noble than all these things, she was strong in the Catholic faith, and served Almighty God without reproach."

¹¹⁵ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 39.21. "Tortured without hope of life."

*“Patrem cum Filio ac Spiritum sanctum unius credo esse substantiae
essentiaeque”*¹¹⁶

She remains unbaptised, however, as her monthly period stains the water, rendering it useless for the purpose of baptism, and her subsequent beheading makes of her a Christian martyr.¹¹⁷

Gregory presents the challenges faced by the Catholic princesses Clothild and Ingund in a similar way.¹¹⁸ Ingund’s tormentor is her mother-in-law, Goiswinth. In the pattern of the previous great persecutor, Trasamund, discussed above, Goiswinth begins with persuasive words,¹¹⁹ and in the face of the girl’s defiance, resorts to physical violence, before having the girl stripped and thrown into the pool. It is of no use, as Ingund will not waver. In any case, because of the beating she had already received, she was bleeding, so the pool would have been defiled and rendered useless as before. Like the young woman in *DLH* II.2, Ingund confesses her faith as she rejects the Arian baptism:

¹¹⁶ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 40.3-4. “I believe that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one substance.” In “Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology”, Lucy Grig highlights the irony inherent in Christian martyr torture scenarios. A “paradigmatic relationship” exists between torture and truth, by which the torturer seeks to establish the truth through the abuse of the person under torture. The climax of the martyr’s passion not infrequently comes in the form of a “confession”, but this confession is a statement of the martyr’s beliefs. The credo must then be accepted as the truth, so torture itself has helped to establish Catholicism as the “true” religion (*EME* 11.4 (2002) 334).

¹¹⁷ Gregory turns the young woman’s ordeal into a spectacle reminiscent of the early Christian martyrdoms which were presented in amphitheatres as entertainment for the masses. Judith Perkins argues that suffering was vital to the self-definition of the Christian community in its earliest centuries (*The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London and New York, 1995) 16).

¹¹⁸ *DLH* III.10, V.38.

¹¹⁹ Note the similarity in phraseology: in II.2, *coepit eam primum ad rebaptizandum blandis sermonibus inlicire* (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 39.18-19); in V.38 Goiswinth will not allow Ingund to remain a Catholic, *sed ut rebaptizaretur in Arriana herese, blandis coepit sermonibus inlecere* (Ibid. 244.7-8).

*‘Sufficit satis me ab originale peccato baptismo salutare semel abluta fuisse
et sanctam Trinitatem in una aequalitate esse confessam. Haec me credere
ex corde toto confiteor nec umquam ab hac fide ibo retrorsum.’*¹²⁰

Gregory is making a typological connection to the earlier episode of the *DLH*. Such connections are also common in the Bible, where phrases may be repeated or similar scenarios may be played over again. Such “[r]ecurrences in language and literary form also imply recurrences in essential messages and meanings”.¹²¹ The similarity in language alerts us to the possibility of shared meaning, beyond the broad thematic link of princesses travelling abroad to marry, who encounter religious persecution at the hands of their new families. Ingund was sent to Spain in 579,¹²² so Gregory is now dealing with issues that concerned his own time as bishop of Tours. The web of alliances between the Visigothic and Frankish royal families had been drawn closer than ever by this second-generation marriage, and Gregory perceived Arianism to be a present danger once more.

The new Arian threat

Gregory describes Ingund as an ardent proselytiser who succeeded in persuading her husband to convert from Arianism to Catholicism, and who was, as we have seen, eloquently adamant in her refusal to abandon her creed.¹²³ We are told that Ingund

¹²⁰ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 244.8-11. “It is enough for me to have been cleansed once of original sin by the baptism which will save me, and to have confessed the Holy Trinity as one and equal. I confess from the heart that this is my belief and I will never go back from this faith.”

¹²¹ S. Niditch, “Genesis”, in C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe eds., *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (London, 1992) 12.

¹²² R. Collins, *Early medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity 400-1100* (London, 1983), 45.

¹²³ Ingund cannot have been more than twelve years of age when she married, as Sigibert and Brunhild were married in 567, and Ingund’s own marriage took place in 579. She was therefore around the same age as virgin martyrs such as Agnes, whose approaching nuptials were the trigger for her announcement of her dedication to God, and probably also around the same age as the virgin of *DLH* I.47 who managed to

succeeded in converting Hermenegild, her husband,¹²⁴ so like Clothild, her great-grandmother, she was a successful converter-queen. According to Gregory, when Leovigild heard about the conversion, he was furious and made plans to destroy his son. This allows Gregory to style Hermenegild's subsequent revolt against his father as a religious conflict.¹²⁵ When summoned by Leovigild to discuss their dispute, Gregory has Hermenegild refuse, with the statement:

*'Non ibo, quia infensus es mihi, pro eo quod sim catholicus'*¹²⁶

Ingund's ordeal is offered against a background of "a great persecution of Christians".¹²⁷ The implication is that Ingund was ill-treated within the context of this wider persecution. There is good reason to doubt that such an event took place, however. The persecution is described as having occurred in the same year as the death of Bishop Martin of Braga – 580.¹²⁸ In this year, Leovigild had called a Council at Toledo, at which he offered a "third way" to the Catholics of Spain to allow them to embrace Arianism

persuade her new husband to live with her in chaste partnership. In these cases, it is unsurprisingly the immediate prospect of the loss of virginity, and of dedication to a life other than that which the girl had wished for, which provokes the declaration of faith. In Ingund's case, the preservation of natal religion is also presented as preservation of purity. Ingund's tender years could very well have made the young princess susceptible to overbearing pressure from her mother-in-law. The episode raises questions about the power which might be exercised by a woman over a daughter-in-law who came to her home.

¹²⁴ *DLH* V.38.

¹²⁵ However, other sources disagree that an Arian-Catholic conflict was the crux of the matter. In 579, the same year as Hermenegild's marriage to Ingund, Leovigild had established a subordinate kingdom for his son in the south of Spain, with a capital at Seville. The rebellion, says Collins, was "no more than a repudiation of his father's authority" over this territory (*Early Medieval Spain* 46-7). Hermenegild converted, primarily due to the influence of Leander of Seville rather than Ingund, after the start of the rebellion (*Ibid.*, and Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 171).

¹²⁶ *DLH* V.38, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 245.3. "I will not go, because you are hostile to me because I am a Catholic."

¹²⁷ *Magna eo anno in Hispaniis christianis persecutio fuit* (*DLH* V.38, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 243.17). "In that same year there was a great persecution of Christians in Spain."

¹²⁸ *DLH* V.37.

with fewer theological obstacles. Leovigild's solution was Macedonianism, which accepted the equality of God the Father and the Son, but subordinated the Holy Ghost. He hoped that this proposal would allow for religious unity in Spain. A. T. Fear suggests that if a wider persecution of Christians occurred in Spain, which is by no means clearly the case, it would most likely have been in response to any refusal on the part of Catholics to accept Leovigild's olive branch.¹²⁹ Gregory does not, however, mention this Council until VI.18. We can look more closely at Gregory's possible reasons for distorting the events in Spain.

In *DLH* V.44, we are told that Chilperic had attempted to redefine the Trinity in the hope of making the concept easier to grasp, abolishing the distinction between the Persons of the Godhead.¹³⁰ Kathleen Mitchell suggests that Gregory saw this move as bringing Chilperic within perilous proximity of Arianism, which in its misguided attempt to conceptualise the Trinity in material terms, was dangerously close to idolatry. It is idolatry she suggests, rather than Arianism itself, which Gregory considers to be a plausible threat.¹³¹ However, a reading of Book V, chapters 38, 43 and 44 together points

¹²⁹ Though the proposals of the Council suggest a somewhat conciliatory attitude on Leovigild's part, Fear refers us to Leovigild's lack of toleration for political opponents, suggesting that Leovigild may have had limited patience for those who refused to accept his offer (*Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (Liverpool, 1997) xiii). However, one of those who objected to the proposed measures was John of Bictarum, and although he mentions that many Catholics were converted as a result of the policy, he does not mention violence (John of Bictarum, *Chronicle*, *MGH AA Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII* (II) ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1894) 216.

¹³⁰ See above, p. 6. Leovigild seems to have attempted to introduce a modified form of Arianism, in his case in an attempt to impose a religious hegemony on the Visigothic kingdom (see Van Dam trans., *Glory of the Martyrs* 106 n.94).

¹³¹ *History and Christian Society* 82-91. Heinzelmann also takes this view (*Gregory of Tours* 156.) The King, and the spiritual community for which he was jointly – with the bishop – responsible, would then risk the same punishment as the Hebrews. The wars of Clovis's grandsons were motivated by the pursuit of material gain rather than desire to promote orthodoxy. In this, they came dangerously close to the worship of objects, for which the Hebrews were punished. King Chilperic was particularly guilty of this, The

quite specifically to a concern with Chilperic's relationship with the Spanish king Leovigild, and the possible negative influence that he might have. It is difficult to believe that Gregory's account of his dispute with the heretic Agilan at *DLH* V.43 – sent as envoy by Leovigild to Chilperic to participate in the negotiation of a marriage between Leovigild's son Reccared and Chilperic's daughter Rigunth – and the subsequent revelation that Chilperic was proposing a hybrid creed of his own, have nothing to do with the situation in Spain. Was Gregory perhaps nervous about communication between the two kings, given Chilperic's theological forays? Perhaps he wished to allude indirectly to the connection between Chilperic's proposal and Leovigild's council.

Such changes as proposed by Chilperic threatened to blur the distinctions between heresy and orthodoxy, and as such had implications for Gregory's authority and for the spiritual health of the realm. Gregory wished to demonstrate that he had the definition of orthodoxy at his fingertips, and could present the historical proof of his standpoint. While the boundaries of orthodoxy remained rigid and protected, the faithful were safe. Any attempt to redefine the Trinity, even in the interests of clarity, threatened to upset the

Biblical passages to which Gregory refers in Book I have been chosen to comment on events in Merovingian history, including events of Gregory's own time. The punishment of the Hebrews was one of these selected passages (Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 63). *Post mortem autem Salomonis divisum per duritiam Roboae regnum in duas partes, restiterunt duae tribus ad Roboam, quod Iuda appellabatur; ad Hieroboam autem decem tribus, quod Israhel vocabatur. Post haec igitur ad idolatria declinantes nec prophetarum vaticinia nec eorum interitus nec cladis patriae nec ipsorum etiam regum eos excidia domuerunt. (15) Donec iratus contra eos Dominus excitavit Nabuchodonosor, qui eos in Babiloniam cum omnia templi urnamenta captivos abduxit* (*DLH* I.14-15, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 14.13-19). "After the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into two parts, because of the hardness of Roboam. Two tribes remained to Roboam, and were named Judah, and twelve tribes to Jeroboam, which were called Israel. After this they fell into idolatry and neither the prophesies of the prophets, nor their destruction, nor their country's destruction nor that of their kings would make them turn from it. The Lord was angry and raised up against them Nebuchadnezzar, who with the ornaments of the temple, carried them off captive to Babylon." This passage may bear a more direct significance. Clovis resembles the Old Testament Kings, and after his death in 511, the Merovingian kingdom was divided, leading to in-fighting between his sons, who vied with each other for territory. The situation was repeated after the death of Chlothar I (561).

balance. If such a thing were to happen, where would be drawn the boundary between true faith and false? What would be the effect on men like Gregory, who derived their authority largely from their role as arbiters of this distinction? And most importantly, how could the would-be-faithful be protected from errors that might lead to their damnation? We will return to the presentation of Chilperic, and Gregory's anxieties about the king's orthodoxy, in the next chapter. We now turn to a final facet of gender and heresy in the *DLH*.

The female heretic

Gregory used the graphic account of Ingund's abuse at Goiswinth's hands to lend weight to his assertion that the queen was the main instigator in the persecution of Christians.¹³² If she were capable of putting such violent pressure on her daughter-in-law in the interests of religion, why not others as well? The purpose of granting such dominant and aggressive agency to Goiswinth is to demean and feminise Leovigild, highlighting the foreignness of the Spanish royal family and their religion by overturning expected gender roles. The Gallic ideal, as Gregory perceives it, is for women to be controlled, so the very ability of Goiswinth to act with such authority is foreign. She also proselytizes violently, in contrast to the elder Clothild's gentle persuasion of Clovis. Likewise, as already shown, Brunhild submits to gentle exhortation to convert to Catholicism. The obvious truth of Catholic doctrine does not require the added enticement of flattery or threats.

¹³² Gregory's assertion of Goiswinth's leading role in the persecution is at odds with that of John of Biclarum, who states that Goiswinth actually supported and encouraged Hermenegild in his rebellion. (John of Biclarum, *Chronicle* 579.3, *MGH AA Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII* (II) 215).

In this context we should recall the triptych of chapters at *DLH* III.3, 4, and 5 analysed earlier.¹³³ Amalaberg's behaviour can similarly be interpreted as a result of a failure on her husband's part to exercise due authority.¹³⁴ In an inversion of correct gender roles, he has allowed her to step out of control and to browbeat him into a reprehensible act. Her dominance feminises him, rendering him fit only for conquest. Though Sigismund is a Catholic, he too has allowed himself to be persuaded to commit a dreadful crime.¹³⁵ He is condemned by association with the events of the previous chapter, and deserves no better fate than Hermanfrid.

It is perhaps in relation to Amalasuntha in particular that the full complexity of Gregory's method can be examined. It has been noted that Gregory's picture of this queen is incorrect.¹³⁶ His account disagrees fundamentally with the accounts of other authors over such matters as Amalasuntha's personality and the course of her life. We might expect that Cassiodorus, who was Amalasuntha's adviser and a writer of official correspondence for the Ostrogothic government, would take a particularly positive view of her personality, and this he does.¹³⁷ However, Procopius, who never met Amalasuntha,

¹³³ See above, 65-9.

¹³⁴ *DLH* III.4.

¹³⁵ *DLH* III.5.

¹³⁶ Dalton says Gregory's passages on Amalasuntha are largely "fantastic", and states that "her private character, so far as history reveals it, was untarnished". He cites Procopius's *Secret History* as stating that it was the Empress Theodora rather than Theudat who was responsible for her death (Dalton, *the History of the Franks* 514). However, it suits Gregory's purpose that Theudat should be responsible instead. In an MA thesis examining and evaluating the accounts of the various historians who discuss her, Jonathan P. Craddock suggests that, of the four main sources – Procopius, Cassiodorus, Jordanes and Gregory – Gregory, as the only one who was not a contemporary, gives the least reliable account (*Amalasuntha: Ostrogothic Successor A.D. 526-535*, (California State University 1996) 74). It is not, however, within the scope of his thesis to examine the reasons for these divergences.

¹³⁷ See his letter to the Roman Senate, written shortly after his promotion to the position of Prefect in 534, Cassiodorus enthuses: her most fittingly do all kingdoms venerate, whom to behold is to adore, to listen to

viewed her most positively,¹³⁸ so her good fame extended beyond those close to her, or indeed those with reason to owe her gratitude. How far Gregory was mistaken, and how far he deliberately manipulated events to make a more suitable story for the points he wished to make, is open to debate.¹³⁹ However, it is my contention that he was less interested in the historical character of Amalasuntha than in what she could represent. She is a dangerous heretical woman. She is sexually loose, like the Biblical foreign woman and like the female heretics described by the fourth-century patristic writers discussed above, implying a capacity to entice an orthodox male away from the proper faith. Amalasuntha is not a historical figure for Gregory, and he has no intention of rendering her as such. She is a warning of the dangers of “Otherness”, of the foreign, heretical female. Amalasuntha’s inappropriate relationship with the slave demonstrates her lack of regard for sexual propriety; she would not care if she were seducing a man from his proper partner of orthodox Christian faith. She is also contemptuous of parental authority: her mother had asked her not to abase her lineage and to choose someone worthy of her, but to no avail.

Amalasuntha’s fate resembles that of the idolatrous nation of Israel, personified as a straying wife by the prophet Hosea. The people of Italy call King Theudat of Tuscany

is to witness a miracle. (Cassiodorus, *Variae*, trans. Thomas Hodgkin, as *The Letters of Cassiodorus* (London, 1886), viewed online at The Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18590/18590-h/18590-h.htm>)).

¹³⁸ “Now Amalasuntha, as guardian of her child, administered the government, and she proved to be endowed with wisdom and regard for justice in the highest degree, displaying to a great extent the masculine temper” (Procopius, *History of the Wars* V.2, trans. H. B. Dewing, viewed online at The Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20298/20298-h/20298-h.htm>)).

¹³⁹ John Moorhead has looked at the convergences between Gregory’s account and those of other contemporary writers, and argues that Gregory has simply got some of the details wrong (*Theodoric in Italy* (Oxford, 1992) 228-9).

to rule over them, and when he learns of the “wickedness” of the “harlot” (*meretrix*), he has her killed. In this description of her Gregory has again chosen to focus on sexual misdemeanour rather than to describe her as a murderess; we might have expected him to focus on the more heinous of her crimes. However, Amalasuntha’s sexual immorality could be read as a metaphor for the straying of Arianism away from correct doctrine. In Ezekiel 16, one of the most problematic texts for feminist readers of the Bible,¹⁴⁰ the word *meretrix* crops up no less than four times. In this text, the apostasy of God’s people is once again depicted as the promiscuity of a woman, and it is here that the envisioned punishments for this crime are harshest.¹⁴¹ The punishment for the straying wife of God, as described by Hosea, is to be stripped, barricaded and prevented by her husband from seeing her lovers.¹⁴² Amalasuntha is also enclosed, this time in the bathhouse, where she is (presumably) also naked. Gregory follows the Biblical model in choosing to express the fear of foreignness, and particularly foreign religion, as fear of a foreign female. His spiritual geography is one that sees Gaul as a religious epicentre, around which there gather dangerous unorthodox elements.

¹⁴⁰ See Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16”.

¹⁴¹ On the possible reasons for the harshness of these punishments, see Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve* 111-134. Another interesting connection between this passage of the *DLH* and the Book of Ezekiel is that, in Gregory’s account, Amalasuntha is a little girl when her father dies. We know that in truth she had already been married and widowed, and had a young son. Gregory may be styling her in the mould of the whorish Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16, who is described as an abandoned infant, “And when thou wast born, in the day of thy nativity thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed with water for thy health, nor salted with salt, nor swaddled with clouts” (Ezekiel 16.4), and the sisters of Ezekiel 23, again characterised as sexually immoral women. In this case, the promiscuous ways of the girls are evident in their youth, and carry on into adulthood (Ezekiel 23.1-21).

¹⁴² “Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born” (Hosea 2.3). “Wherefore behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and I will stop it up with a wall, and she shall not find her paths” (Hosea 2.6). King Theudat is not Amalasuntha’s husband, but is of the social class from which she should have chosen a husband. It may be argued, then, that in taking responsibility for her punishment he takes the role of the wronged husband, and that he is actually punishing her for being a heretic. Alternatively, he may be likened to the foreign powers to whom the Israelites were subordinated as a punishment for idolatry.

Gregory is also drawing on the tradition of feminising heresy that began with the defence against Arianism in the fourth century. He goes one step further, choosing an historical figure to bear the symbolic weight. Amalasuntha's promiscuity, otherwise historically unsubstantiated, is not only consistent with the description of women heretics found in the patristic texts, but also represents the looseness of scriptural interpretation that the orthodox Catholic Church saw in all heresy.

Conclusion

Gregory's preoccupation with heresy and orthodoxy, and the definition of each in relation to the other, is played out to a disproportionate extent through the experiences of women. Young royal women frequently found themselves on the front line in this conflict. As the bishop of Tours, Gregory met Spanish and Frankish envoys travelling to and fro to negotiate marriages between the two kingdoms, and a good deal of his information about the Visigoths may have been derived from such envoys. Arian women who came to Gaul from other countries did not present a threat. The simple veracity of the Catholic faith, when set out before them, convinced these women to abandon their natal creed and accept that of their new home. Catholic women who went abroad to marry had the enviable opportunity to test their faith in adverse circumstances, and also to encourage others onto the correct path.

Gregory's attitude towards Arianism was not merely triumphant; he restates his concerns in book V of the *DLH*, in which he has become anxious about the materialist goals of the Franks, and about the possibility that King Chilperic was straying into

heresy. He links this book to the concerns of books II and III by styling the persecution of Ingund in a similar way to that of the young noblewoman persecuted by Trasamund, and also to that of Clothild the Younger.

The association of women with blood and impurity allowed Gregory to make a point about the impurity of Arianism, never better symbolised than in the ignominious end of Arius himself. Gregory also used Arian women to articulate concerns about foreignness, or more specifically foreign religion. Inasmuch as true faith was what distinguished the Franks from those around them, Gregory envisaged them as the nation of Israel, whose menfolk were tempted into idolatry by the seductive wiles of foreign women. In the portrayal of Amalasuntha, Gregory warns his readers of the sexual immorality of such women, alluding also to the descriptions of Arian women found in the writings of patristic authors from the fourth century onwards. Amalasuntha can also be understood as a personification of Arianism itself. Arianism is apostasy, in that its followers were imagined as having strayed away from true faith. Gregory reminds his readers, a clerical elite on whom the association would not be lost, of this fact with a fabricated account of Amalasuntha's sexual misdemeanours. This lack of chastity, the lack of acknowledgment that her responsibility was to marry someone worthy of her, reminds us of the Hebrew prophets' characterisation of the apostate nation of Israel as a whore. The punishment that she receives is likewise reminiscent of some of these Biblical passages. He may have styled his portrait of Goiswinth in a similar way. Women are central to Gregory's strategy of representing orthodoxy and heresy, and thus of crucial importance to his world-view. This chapter has demonstrated again that cordoning

“Gregory’s women” off as a separate topic of inquiry is of little use in understanding Gregory’s technique, and does a grave disservice to the complexity and nuances of his work as a whole. Chapter 4 will build on the discussion begun in this chapter on the relationship between Gregory and Chilperic, which, it will be argued, cannot be fully appreciated without a simultaneous study of Chilperic’s consort, Fredegund.

Chapter 4

De malitia Fredegunde

*Chilpericus, Nero nostri temporis et Herodis.*¹

So Gregory begins his account of the death of Chilperic, the arch-villain of the *DLH*, whose delight in worldly indulgence was matched only by his enthusiasm for persecuting the Church. Such is the lasting impression given by the detailing of Chilperic's many crimes in VI.46. However, Guy Halsall warns against the temptation to judge Chilperic entirely by the image presented in this one excoriating chapter.² Chilperic may have been a talented ruler,³ whose perceived dislike of the Church may in fact have been a conscientious abhorrence of unworthy bishops; an antipathy which Gregory shared.⁴ What is more, Gregory's own portrayal of Chilperic does not reveal a consistently and fatally flawed character.⁵ Martin Heinzelmänn suggests that this is because Gregory's opinion of the king was not negatively fixed until fairly late in the latter's career,⁶ while Halsall proposes that Gregory was forced to compose a posthumous character

¹ *DLH* V.46, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 319.13-14.

² Halsall, "Nero and Herod?" 339.

³ Despite Gregory's praise for Guntram, "it is likely that Chilperic was the more impressive monarch and inspired the greater respect" (Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 69-70). Guy Halsall praises his tactical nous in *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West 450-900*, (London, 2003) 160-1.

⁴ E. James, *The Franks* (Oxford, 1988) 167.

⁵ Most notably, despite Gregory's criticisms in VI.46 about Chilperic's animosity towards the Church, he did sometimes demonstrate respect towards bishops and the institution they served. To give just two examples, in VI.10, Chilperic granted Gregory's own request to pardon some thieves who had broken into the Church of St Martin at Tours (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 279-80), and later refused to believe accusations of incontinence made by a group of conspirators against Aetherius, the elderly bishop of Lisieux (VI.36, *ibid.* 308), cf. Halsall, "Nero and Herod?" 338.

⁶ *Gregory of Tours* 41.

assassination of the Neustrian king in order to ingratiate himself with King Guntram.⁷ Absent from the discussion is any serious attempt to rehabilitate the character of Chilperic's wife, Fredegund,⁸ who shortly after the death of her husband was accused of his and four other royal murders. A woman whose viciousness became legendary, she seems to personify the very darkness of the "Dark Ages".

That Gregory was heavily influenced by the Bible in his portrayal of kings is now something of a commonplace.⁹ That Gregory as he appeared in the *DLH* was also a literary creation – an idealised bishop of Tours following in the footsteps of St. Martin – is a concept which also now enjoys considerable, perhaps universal, scholarly support. The idea that the role Gregory created for himself is dependant on that of Chilperic has also been proposed before: the confrontation between the two is, as Heinzelmann has put it, that of "the prophet versus the godless king".¹⁰ However, the character of Fredegund has not been examined in the light of such work. In a recent article, Guy Halsall noted the crucial role of the Preface to Book V of the *DLH*, both as a possible starting point for Gregory's writing, and as encapsulating the argument of the work as a whole.¹¹ As has been stated in Chapter one of the current thesis, I agree with Halsall and other authors as to the crucial importance of this Preface, but I believe, along with Heinzelmann, that the

⁷ Guntram's insecurity and vengeful nature made him an unpredictable foe, and it was he, suggests Halsall, that Gregory truly feared ("Nero and Herod?" 347-349).

⁸ Although Janet Nelson opens the debate by cautioning against a too-simplistic assessment of Fredegund's character, on the grounds that she is styled as the "female counterpart in villainy" to Chilperic; the pair being set against the rather more laudable coupling of Brunhild and Sigibert ("Queens as Jezebels" 40).

⁹ See in particular Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 43, 51-9; Wynn, "Wars and Warriors"; Hen, "The Uses of the Bible".

¹⁰ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 41 quoting Reydellet, *La Royauté* 447.

¹¹ Halsall, "The Preface to Book V".

imagined recipient was Chilperic.¹² This Preface, and Chilperic's character, must therefore be considered as crucial to the genesis and original purpose of the *DLH*. Halsall drew attention to the echoes of V.Pref in a later speech made by Fredegund, at V.34.¹³ However, it will be shown that Fredegund's speech is paired with the Preface, rather than merely serving to echo and highlight the importance of the Preface itself, as Halsall suggests. The Preface is Gregory's prophesy, and Fredegund's speech, which reflects the Preface in structure as well as theme, is essentially an acknowledgement – on behalf of both Fredegund and her husband, as it is to him that her words are addressed – that the prophesy has come true. Fredegund and Chilperic, as a pair, are vital to Gregory's own image in the *DLH*.

Just as Fredegund's reputation has not benefitted from the more literary studies of Gregory's work, it has not been appreciably affected by the now considerable body of scholarship on the literary stereotypes available to ancient and medieval writers who wished to castigate powerful women.¹⁴ Lacking as she does the historiographical complexity of a Brunhild (d. 613) or a Balthild,¹⁵ (d. 680) and without the former's

¹² See above, 41-2.

¹³ Halsall, "The Preface to Book V" 303-4.

¹⁴ See for example Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild", Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, various essays in *GEMW*, S. Fischler, "Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: the Case of the Imperial Women at Rome", in L. J. Archer, S. Fischler and M. Wyke eds., *Women in Ancient Societies: "An illusion of the night"* (Hampshire and London, 1994) 115-133, and the essays in B. Garlick, S. Dixon and P. Allen eds., *Stereotypes of Women in Power* (Westport, 1992).

¹⁵ The *DLH* is the only extensive source for Fredegund, although she makes brief appearances in the *Fredegar*, *Chron.* IV, chs. 3, 17 (*MGH SSRM* II, 124, 127-8), and Wallace-Hadrill, *Fredegar* 5, 12; the *LHF* chs. 31, 35-7, (*MGH SSRM* II, 291-293, 301-307), and a couple of poems by Venantius Fortunatus (See for example *Carmina* 9.1-9.5, *Opera Poetica*, ed. F. Leo, *MGH AA* IV.I (Berlin, 1881) 201-210. (Eng. trans. of *Carmina* 9.1-9.3 in George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* 73-87.) The sources for Brunhild are rather more complex. Aside from the *DLH*, she features in *Fredegar*, *Chron.* IV, chs. 19, 21, 24, 27, 30, 32, 34-36, 40-42 (*MGH SSRM* II, 128-135, 140-141), Wallace-Hadrill, *Fredegar* 12-16, 18-25, 27, 32-35); in the *LHF*, chs. 33, 37-40 (297-299, 302, 306, 309-311, and in the work of

complex family connections and the machinations associated with these, it is perhaps understandable that Fredegund has not attracted quite so much scholarly attention. One notable exception is the work of Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, who uses Fredegund in support of the thesis that Merovingian women participated in cycles of honour which transcended the constraints of gender.¹⁶ However, O. M. Dalton's assessment of Chilperic's queen has never been effectively challenged:

“Hers was a wickedness so elemental that we feel horror at the blank
absence of honour, mercy, and the finer feelings.”¹⁷

This chapter will offer a revisionist reading of Gregory's Fredegund, without whom a thesis on “Gender and Violence in Gregory's *DLH*” is incomplete. Fredegund was, it will be argued, the essential counterpart to the character of Chilperic,¹⁸ and thus to the version of himself that Gregory wished to leave to posterity. Gregory used a number of different literary stereotypes - Jezebel, stepmother and the associations between

Fortunatus, *Carminae* 6.1, 6.1a, 10.7, 10.8, Appendix 6 (124-130, 239-241, 280). She is also the villainess of Jonas of Bobbio's *Life of Columbanus* (chs. 32-33, trans. in Peters ed., *Monks, Bishops and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500-700* (Philadelphia, 1975) 94-96) and of *Vitae Desiderii Episcopi Viennensis* written by Sisebut (chs. 4, 8-10, 15, 16, 20, 21, *MGH SSRM* III 631-637, and trans. by A.T. Fear as “Life and Martyrdom of Saint Desiderius” in A. T. Fear ed., *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (Liverpool, 1997) 4-7, 9-10, 13-14.) Many letters to and from her have been preserved, which are testament to her ambition and influence. (See *Epistolae Austrasicae*, in *Epistolae aevi merovingici collectae*, ed. W. Gundlach, *MGH Epist.* III, *Merovingici at Karolini aevi* 1 (Berlin, 1902) 122-124, 139-140.) Balthild has her own *Vita*, the *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, in *MGH SSRM* II (Hanover, 1888) 475-508; she also appears in Chapter 1 of the continuations to the fourth Book of Fredegar's *Chronicle* (*MGH SSRM* II 168) in the *LHF*, chs. 43, 44, (*MGH SSRM* II 315-317) and in the *Passio Leodegarii* I.2 (B. Krusch and W. Levison eds., *MGH SSRM* V (Hanover, 1910) 284). A counter to the image in her own *Vita* can be found in ch. 6 of the *Passio Sancti Wilfrithi* by Eddius Stephanus (Eng. trans. J.F. Webb, in D.H. Farmer ed., *The Age of Bede* (London, 1998) 113) which holds her responsible for the deaths of no fewer than nine bishops.

¹⁶ See Pancer, *Sans Peur*, and “De-gendering female violence”.

¹⁷ Comments in the introductory vol. (vol. 1) of his translation of the *DLH* 74-75.

¹⁸ Leslie Brubaker similarly argues that the portrayal of the Empress Theodora in Procopius' *Secret History* should not be taken at face value, as it is intended primarily to reflect badly on her husband, the Emperor Justinian (L. Brubaker, “Sex, lies and textuality”).

women and secrecy - to create a monster. As suggested in the previous chapter, Gregory was concerned about the religious orthodoxy of King Chilperic.¹⁹ In this chapter, we explore the way in which the striking similarity of Fredegund's behaviour to that of the female Arians who disgrace the pages of the *DLH* helped Gregory to articulate his unease.

The earlier chapters of this thesis have highlighted the intertwining of spiritual and political concerns in Gregory's work as bishop, of which the writing of the *DLH* should of course be considered a vital part. In this chapter, the first in which we examine events taking place during Gregory's own period in office, the extent to which his desired image of himself was compromised by political realities becomes clearer. To what degree were his opinion and the image he has left to us of Fredegund shaped by his own political loyalties?

What can Fredegund tell us about the role of the royal wife and mother? Her associations with violence are too many and varied to be explained away as rumour and slander. However, such acts of violence may not have been entirely destructive. The removal of her stepsons benefitted her husband as well as herself, and may have served to limit intra-fraternal violence, as well as the many casualties that might have been associated with this, in later years.

¹⁹ See Chapter 3, 120-2.

Vita Fredegundis

Aside from the *DLH*, Fredegund features in the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, the *LHF*, and various *carmina* by the Italian poet Venantius Fortunatus. Fredegund's origins are somewhat obscure. The *LHF* describes her as a low-born attendant of Chilperic's queen, Audovera,²⁰ and states that it was from this position that she insinuated herself into the bed of the king. She tricked Audovera into making an error over the christening of their daughter, which aroused Chilperic's anger and caused him to repudiate Audovera in favour of Fredegund herself.²¹ She was his partner until 566, when Chilperic, having observed his older half-brother Sigibert making a politically advantageous match with the Visigothic princess Brunhild, asked for and obtained the hand of her sister Galswinth. However, Fredegund remained close enough to the court to excite Galswinth's jealousy, and Chilperic soon had his royal bride killed.²² The *LHF* asserts much more directly that Fredegund created a dispute between Galswinth and Chilperic, and that it was at Fredegund's suggestion that the murder was committed.²³ The *DLH*, *Fredegar* and the *LHF* all blame her for hiring the assassins who killed Sigibert at Vitry in 575.²⁴

Despite having rid the court of her two rivals, Audovera and Galswinth, Fredegund still had to contend with Audovera's three sons, Theudebert, Merovech and Clovis; all rivals to her own children. Theudebert was conveniently killed in battle in

²⁰ The assumption that Fredegund was a slave is based on this, and on an insulting comment from her daughter (*DLH* IX.34).

²¹ *LHF* ch. 31.

²² *DLH* IV.28.

²³ *Post haec per consilium pessimum Fredegundis eam per noctem in strato suo strangulavit* (*LHF* 31, *MGH SSRM* II, 292.12-14).

²⁴ *DLH* IV.51, *Chronicle of Fredegar* III.71, *LHF* ch.32.

574,²⁵ but Merovech sought to push his advantage through marrying Brunhild, his uncle Sigibert's widow.²⁶ His plans having gone awry, Merovech asked a servant to kill him in order to avoid falling into the hands of his enemies.²⁷ However, rumour persisted that Fredegund had had a hand in his final downfall.²⁸ In 580, she found herself tainted with a slander that she had been unfaithful to Chilperic, with Bertram, Bishop of Bordeaux. Gregory himself was charged with spreading this rumour at Berny-Rivière in the same year.²⁹ A former slave, Fredegund was completely dependant on her husband's favour. However, the trial revealed a wider plot, in which Fredegund and her sons were to be killed, Chilperic deposed and his son Prince Clovis elevated to the kingship in his place. Gregory was to have been banished for his alleged part in spreading the rumour. Her innocence – and Gregory's – established, the danger passed, but Fredegund found herself in an even more vulnerable position less than three weeks later, when she lost three young sons, the youngest only a newborn,³⁰ to an epidemic of dysentery.³¹ Her remaining step-son, Clovis, was jubilant in his belief that he would now inherit his father's entire kingdom.³² He also spoke "*non condecebilia*" about Fredegund. She soon sought her

²⁵ DLH IV.50.

²⁶ DLH V.2.

²⁷ 578 (DLH V.18).

²⁸ *Extitirunt tunc qui adsererent, verba Merovechi, quae superius diximus, a regina fuisse conficta, Merovechum vero eius fuisse iussu clam interemptum* (DLH V.18, MGH SSRM I.1, 224.13-15). "There were those who asserted that these words of Merovech, which we mentioned above, were invented by the queen, and that Merovech was secretly slain on her orders."

²⁹ DLH V.48.

³⁰ She may still have been pregnant during the trial (see Smith, "'Carrying the cares of state'" 238).

³¹ DLH V.22, 34.

³² *'Ecce, mortuos fratres meus, ad me restitit omne regnum; mihi universae Galliae subicientur, imperiumque universum mihi fata largita sunt! Ecce inimicis in manu positus inferam quaecumque placuerit!'* (DLH V.39, MGH SSRM I.1, 246.3-5). "'Behold, my brothers are dead, the whole kingdom falls to me, all of Gaul shall be under my dominion, the Fates have given me sovereignty of all! Behold, my enemies are in my hand, to do with as I please!'"

revenge: Clovis was murdered while being kept under watch on an estate called Noisy-le-Gard.³³ Fredegund gave birth to another son, Theuderic, in 582, but lost him two years later.³⁴

Fredegund and Chilperic sought an advantageous marriage for their daughter Rigunth, to the Visigothic prince Reccared, but Chilperic died in 584 as the princess was on her way south, and she was captured and robbed by the Duke Desiderius at Toulouse.³⁵ Rumour held Fredegund responsible for the death of her husband: the *LHF* tells us that she had him killed because he had discovered that she was having an affair with the mayor of the palace, Landeric.³⁶ Fredegund sought protection from Guntram, and received it for a time, in spite of her reputation.³⁷ She was eventually banished to Reuil, near Rouen,³⁸ shortly before Guntram made a new alliance with the Austrasian King Childebert, the son of Sigibert, and formally recognised him as his heir.³⁹ Books VII and VIII of the *DLH* detail many plots and crimes on Fredegund's part, as she battled to secure recognition for her small son, Chlothar, who had been born in 584. This largely involved clearing her own name with regard to the accusations of infidelity which had besmirched her character during Chilperic's lifetime. However, despite the very tender age of her son, she was able to retain the loyalty of many of her husband's followers on

³³ *DLH* V.39.

³⁴ *DLH* VI.23, 34.

³⁵ *DLH* VI.45, VII.9.

³⁶ *LHF* ch. 35.

³⁷ *DLH* VII.5, 7.

³⁸ *DLH* VII.19.

³⁹ *DLH* VII.33.

the boy's behalf.⁴⁰ When the young Chlothar's paternity was questioned by King Guntram, she was able to muster three bishops and three hundred laymen to swear an oath to the effect that Chilperic was indeed the boy's father.⁴¹ Guntram later accepted the boy from the baptismal font – a gesture which functioned as a formal acknowledgment of his legitimacy.⁴² As a widow, Fredegund might have been expected to have been vulnerable, but her reputation remained formidable. In 591, having tired of a bloody dispute between two Frankish families in Tournai, she brought the feud to a close in a decisive fashion. She invited the three survivors, along with a good many others, to a meal. When the three had drunk themselves into a stupor, she had them decapitated.⁴³ She died, apparently peacefully, in 596 or 597, having achieved a measure of security for her small son, who would one day rule the whole of Gaul.⁴⁴

Chilperic's wife

We turn now to examine Fredegund's activities, as described by Gregory, from her first appearance in the *DLH* (IV.28, the events of which took place in 566) until Chilperic's death in 584 (VI.46). In the *DLH*, Fredegund features only very briefly in Book IV, extensively in Book V, and less prominently in Book VI. The reasons for this pattern of appearances will be examined below.

⁴⁰ See *DLH* VII.5, 7, 19.

⁴¹ *Fredegundis regina, coniunctis prioribus regni sui, id est cum tribus episcopis et tricentis viris optimis, sacramenta dederunt, hunc ab Chilperico rege generatum fuisse; et sic suspicio ab animis regis ablata est* (*DLH* VIII.9, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 376.19-22). "Queen Fredegund brought together the most important men of the kingdom, that is, three bishops and three hundred high-born laymen, and they all swore an oath that king Chilperic had fathered the boy, and thus suspicion was removed from the king's mind."

⁴² If "denial of royal paternity [...] was a political act" (Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian family" 158), acknowledgment was surely also political. *DLH* X.28.

⁴³ *DLH* X.27.

⁴⁴ Chlothar II was the sole ruler of Gaul from 613-629.

Gregory became bishop of Tours in 573. The peculiarities of the political situation he faced have been alluded to in earlier chapters of this thesis, but in the context of Books IV, V and VI of the *DLH* – that is, the ones which correspond to the early part of his episcopal career - they become crucial. Gregory's appointment as bishop was a canonically unusual one. He was chosen by King Sigibert, the current holder of the town of Tours, rather than, as was canonically required, by the populace.⁴⁵ A strategic appointment, he was catapulted into Tours to help consolidate Sigibert's tenuous hold over the town.⁴⁶ He had little immediate connection with the town, but circumstances beyond his control had excluded him from succession to the two sees with which he had a more natural association: Lyons and Langres.⁴⁷ Gregory was invested at Rheims rather than at Tours. This was a move designed to ensure his smooth appointment, in the face of some fierce local opposition. It was, once again, uncanonical, as the norm would have been for him to be invested at Tours itself.⁴⁸

Gregory enjoyed considerable support at the Austrasian court. A poem by Fortunatus, written on the occasion of Gregory's appointment, tells us of Sigibert's backing, and also of Brunhild's. Radegund was another supporter.⁴⁹ So it is very probable

⁴⁵ Although by now, "royal patronage was usually decisive" (Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 64).

⁴⁶ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 38-40.

⁴⁷ He was related to Eufronius, the previous incumbent, but had closer familial ties to the other two sees (see Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 56-62 for the scandals which ruled Gregory out of consideration for these sees).

⁴⁸ Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 64, referring to the Council of Orleans a.541, Can.5.

⁴⁹ *Carmen* V.3 (MGH AA IV.1 106, 1.14). Fortunatus refers to a network of support which took in the Austrasian royal family, the Ste. Croix monastery at Poitiers and the see of Tours. Radegund had sent a representative with Sigibert's envoys to Constantinople in 568 to obtain for her a relic of the True Cross. Later, when her local bishop had refused, possibly for very good reasons, to install the relic in her monastery, she had appealed again to Sigibert, who secured the services of the then bishop of Tours, Eufronius, to perform the task (*DLH* IX.40). When Radegund died, Maroveus was not present to perform

that Gregory spent some time at the Austrasian court prior to his appointment. It is here that he would have been immersed in the politics of the time, and where he might first have heard of the character and crimes of Fredegund; particularly of her hand in the murder of Brunhild's sister, Galswinth.⁵⁰ We do not hear from Gregory of Fredegund's earlier career, or the means by which she allegedly gained her initial place in Chilperic's bed. It is surely significant that Fredegund instead makes her *DLH* debut as the woman for whom Chilperic disposed of Galswinth, his new Visigothic bride. It is at this point that she would first have become known to Brunhild, and simultaneously earned her enmity. Was this the context that framed Gregory's earliest understanding of the politics of the time?⁵¹

There may have been a more directly political edge to Gregory's first sketches of Chilperic and Fredegund: that Gregory was needed at Tours at all suggests that Sigibert's rule over the town was as unpopular in some quarters as Gregory's episcopate.⁵²

the necessary ceremonies, so the bishop of Tours – this time Gregory himself – was called upon once again. This network has implications for the Gundovald episode: the pretender cited the support of Radegund and Ingtrude of Tours; (*DLH* VII.37) Guntram suspected that Brunhild wished to marry him (*DLH* IX.28); and Gregory's attitude towards his plight and death suggest that he believed there was more substance to his claim than is at first obvious.

⁵⁰ *DLH* IV.28.

⁵¹ Similarly, the Treaty of Andelot, (*DLH* IX.20) which restored to Brunhild those cities which had formed part of her sister's *morgengabe*, and which follows the longed-for alliance between Childebert / Brunhild and Guntram, appears to represent the end of the civil strife which had hitherto marked Merovingian politics. Brunhild's political concerns and intrigues form an undercurrent throughout much of Gregory's career, and therefore through much of the writing of the *DLH*.

⁵² The power struggles between the Merovingian kings over Tours, and the difficulties that these presented for Gregory as he took charge of the diocese, are described by Pietri in her *La ville de Tours*, at 265-274.

Demonstrating the divine approval of the state of affairs may have been a part of his job as Sigibert's appointee.⁵³

The events of the year 573 can be found towards the end of *DLH* Book IV. However, Gregory does not introduce his own character until early in Book V. He ends Book IV with Sigibert's murder in 575, allowing Book V to mark not only Gregory's official entry into the *DLH*, but also the passing of Tours from the control of the king who had appointed Gregory - and to whom he appears to have felt some loyalty - to that of Chilperic. In so doing, he set the scene for the confrontation between the character of "Gregory, Bishop of Tours" and the royal couple, Chilperic and Fredegund. This was a confrontation which would allow him to define the image of himself that he wished to leave to later generations, and would influence heavily posterity's lasting impression of the king and queen. Sigibert was assassinated, we are told, at the instigation of Fredegund.⁵⁴ This piece of information sets the scene for the role that she will play in the next Book.

Gregory's relationship with King Chilperic has been a matter of lively debate.⁵⁵ For the first time, this chapter emphasises that Gregory's main concern was not the

⁵³ Throughout his episcopate, Gregory reckoned years by the length of time that the Austrasian kings - first Sigibert, then his son, Childebert - had been on the throne, marking his continued loyalty to them.

⁵⁴ *Tunc duo pueri cum cultris validis, quos vulgo scramasaxos vocant, infectis vinino, malificati a Fredegundae regina, cum aliam causam suggerire simularent, utraque ei latera feriunt. At ille vociferans atque conruens, non post multo spatio emisit spiritum (DLH IV.51, MGH SSRM I.1, 188.12-15).* "Then two servants who had been bewitched by Fredegund appeared, carrying strong knives, commonly called scramasaxes, which were smeared with poison, pretending that they would speak with him, struck him from both sides. Crying out, he fell, giving up the ghost after a short period."

⁵⁵ See Halsall "Nero and Herod" for further bibliography, in addition to notes in the Introduction to this thesis.

castigation of the king, but the creation of a counterpoint to his own character. Thus, while Heinzelmann and Reydellet both emphasize Gregory's desire "to cast anathema on the diabolical couple Chilperic and Fredegund" by presenting himself as the prophet set against them,⁵⁶ I suggest that his concerns fell rather more in the opposite direction: he wished primarily to style himself as a prophet, and cast the royal couple opposite himself in order to achieve this. The role he attributed to himself framed his image of Fredegund and Chilperic. This proposal resolves to some extent the puzzle of the inconsistencies in the king and queen's behaviour: if Gregory truly intended to style them as evil, surely it would have been perfectly straightforward for him to do so. Instead, they behave deplorably only when required to do so by the demands of their role. Fredegund appears only briefly in Book IV because her presence is not yet required. The *DLH*'s Fredegund, then, is in part a literary creation, and just as is the case with her husband, Gregory's image of her should be read with some caution. She is a vital foil to her husband, and is therefore, along with him, essential to Gregory's self-definition in Book V.

Book V occupies a crucial position in the *DLH*,⁵⁷ and the Book's preface holds the key to several of the work's main themes: the futility of civil wars and the pursuit of wealth, and the necessity of the pursuit, instead, of spiritual goals.⁵⁸ It also introduces Gregory's own role. He is a bishop who will assume the responsibility of addressing the

⁵⁶ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 43, quoting Reydellet, *La Royauté* 448.

⁵⁷ Halsall, "Nero and Herod?" 339-342; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 41-48; Mitchell, *History and Christian Society* 78-99.

⁵⁸ On the preface's importance for the understanding of Gregory's themes, see Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 41-43. See Halsall, "The Preface to Book V" 297-317 for a discussion of the rhetorical strategy employed by Gregory in this preface, and for an interpretation of the precise historical circumstances surrounding its composition.

kings directly, for their spiritual benefit.⁵⁹ He will not fear them. In this aim, he will be the true successor of St. Martin. The third and most famous bishop of Tours had been no respecter of persons,⁶⁰ and later bishops of Tours ought ideally to be cut from the same cloth; Gregory wished to demonstrate his own credentials as a true bishop of Tours in the mould of his most celebrated predecessor: one who did not fear to assert spiritual over earthly authority. Towards the end of the preface, he switches from lecturing kings in plural, to addressing a single king. This is Chilperic, against whom he sets himself for the rest of the Book.⁶¹

It is during the trial of the Bishop Praetextatus, played out at length in *DLH* V.18, that the roles of the king and queen are most clearly drawn, and along with them, the role of Bishop Gregory himself. Praetextatus was accused of conspiring against Chilperic, and had officiated at the marriage of Merovech, Chilperic's son, and Brunhild, the widow of Sigibert. The marriage, as Chilperic complained, was against canon law, but it was his son's apparent bid for power that worried the king. If defrocked and tried in a civil court, Praetextatus faced death for the crime of treason.

⁵⁹ E.g., *Cavete discordiam, cavete bella civilia, quae vos populumque vestrum expugnant*. (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 194.2-3.) "Beware discord, beware civil wars, by which you and your people are destroyed."

⁶⁰ Martin refused numerous requests to dine with the emperor, and when he eventually agreed to attend a banquet, he ignored the established pecking order, and gave a ceremonial cup to his priest after he had finished drinking from it himself. Sulpicius Severus, "The Life of Saint Martin of Tours", trans. F.R. Hoare, in T.F.X. Noble and T. Head eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995) 21-22. Injuriosus similarly had no qualms when faced with tax demands from King Chlothar (*DLH* IV.2).

⁶¹ I follow Heinzelmann here, rather than the more recent theory put forward by Guy Halsall, that this individual king is Merovech, one of Chilperic's sons by his first wife, Audovera (Halsall, "The Preface to Book V" 313-315).

Gregory saw his opportunity. Crucially, he was inspired by the words of Aetius, the archdeacon of Paris, who called the bishops' attention to the gravity of the moment:

*'Audite me, o sacerdotes Domini, qui in unum collecti estis; aut enim hoc tempore exaltabitis nomen vestrum et bonae famae gratia refulgebitis, aut certe nullus vos amodo pro Dei sacerdotibus est habiturus, si personas vestras sagaciter non eregitis aut fratrem perire permittetis.'*⁶²

Gregory alone answered the call, allowing Aetius' brief statement to introduce his own lengthy speech, and effectively stepping up to the archdeacon's challenge. Gregory addressed his fellow clergymen, reminding them that they had a duty to advise Chilperic against forcing Praetextatus to submit to a secular trial: an act of persecution which would cost the king his own salvation. He cited the example of a previous bishop who had not allowed fear of royal power to prevent him from doing his duty,⁶³ and an Emperor who had incurred the divine wrath for his bullying of a bishop,⁶⁴ thus strengthening his own relationship with these leaders and with the Old Testament prophets who were their antetypes.⁶⁵ This speech is vital to Gregory's creation of his own image: it links back to the Preface of the Book, in which Gregory offers sound advice to the kings of the realm. He now implores his fellow bishops to do the same.

⁶² *DLH* V.18, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 217.17-20. "Hear me, bishops of the Lord, who are here gathered into one. The time is come when either your name will be exalted and you will shine with the fame of good grace, or you will no longer be regarded as bishops of God, if you lack the wisdom to play your part, and allow your brother to perish."

⁶³ This is Avitus, Abbot of Saint-Mesmin de Micy, who warned King Chlodomer, who had captured the Burgundian king Sigismund and his family, that to kill these prisoners would bring about divine retribution. Chlodomer disregarded the warning, but Avitus was prescient, and Chlodomer was himself killed not long afterwards (*DLH* III.6).

⁶⁴ The Emperor Maximus forced Saint Martin to live with another bishop who had committed murder. He suffered the punishment of a cruel death (*morte pessima*) (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 218.16).

⁶⁵ cf. Heinzelmänn, *Gregory of Tours* 141-2.

Later, Chilperic himself meets with Gregory, anxious to know why the bishop is opposing his interests. This encounter is heavily stylised, with Chilperic offering food, which the bishop refuses, as ‘[n]oster cibus esse debet facere voluntatem Dei et non in his deliciis dilectare, ut ea quae praecipit nullo casu praetermittamus.’⁶⁶ Devotion to worldly pleasures, including food, was a form of idolatry. We are told in VI.46 that to Chilperic, *deus venter fuit*.⁶⁷ Gregory sets himself apart and underlines his personal authority by refusing such things:⁶⁸ when he eventually does agree to take a little sustenance, it is simply a little bread and wine; a meal intended to evoke Holy Communion.

Chilperic’s portrait is drawn with an eye to the portrait of King Ahab in 1 Kings 21. Ahab was also a man whose desire for earthly wealth caused him to covet the belongings of others. However, Ahab’s portrait cannot be considered complete without that of his wife, the dreadful Jezebel. Similarly, Chilperic’s image as created by Gregory requires that of his wife as its counterpart.⁶⁹ Fredegund’s servants come to Gregory to

⁶⁶ *DLH* V.18, *MGH SRM* I.1, 220.6-8. “‘Our food should be to do the will of God, and not to take pleasure in such delights, so that we in no way transgress his commandments.’”

⁶⁷ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 320.5. “his God was his belly.”

⁶⁸ Claudia Rapp identifies three vital components that make up the authority of the late antique bishop: pragmatic authority, spiritual authority and ascetic authority. Each of these verified and supported the other two. For example, the practice of ascetic habits, as demonstrated by Gregory in his meeting with Chilperic, implied that the bishop was in possession of the Spirit, which could only be acquired as a gift from God. Pragmatic authority – the ability to act for the spiritual benefit of others, and by implication, to offer religious leadership – was heavily dependant on both spiritual and ascetic authority (C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005) 16-22.

⁶⁹ Many mediaeval writers cast their actors in the style of Biblical figures, and while there is a vast choice of rounded, good-but-flawed royal males to choose from in the Bible, templates for women tend to be rather more black-and-white. Thus comparisons with Jezebel are ubiquitous in descriptions of queens described as wicked. See for example Nelson, “Brunhild and Balthild.” For other discussions of the importance of literary stereotype in the construction of a queen’s image, see M. de Jong, “Bride shows revisited: praise, slander and exegesis in the reign of the empress Judith”, *GEMW* 257-77; Stafford,

persuade him to join in the condemnation of Praetextatus.⁷⁰ This encounter also appears stylised, with the queen attempting to resolve the situation where the king's persuasion had failed: this echoes Jezebel's procurement of Naboth's vineyard for her husband.⁷¹ In Gregory's account of his meeting with Fredegund's servants, he titles her "Queen Fredegund", which, while not unusual, seems in this instance to signal her appearance in an archetypal role – that of "wicked queen who opposes the just prophet" – rather than simply as herself. Just as it is Jezebel who is Elijah's real opponent in 1 Kings, and not Ahab,⁷² so here, the impetus for Praetextatus's persecution, and therefore the person engaged in a battle of wills with Gregory, is Fredegund.⁷³ Her servants claim that '[i]am omnium episcoporum promissionem habemus; tantum tu adversus non incedas.'⁷⁴ The impression we are given is of the last courageous bishop, standing alone for justice, while the other bishops have already agreed to do the king and queen's bidding.

Gregory also makes use of the trope of the overly influential wife.⁷⁵ Ahab is regarded as having been manipulated and encouraged by Jezebel:

Queens, Concubines and Dowagers 24 and "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries" in J. Carmi Parsons ed., *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994) 143-167; Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High Medieval Queen"; S. Klein, *Ruling Women*.

⁷⁰ They offer silver, which may be intended to echo the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26.15).

⁷¹ In 1 Kings 21.4, Ahab sulks over his inability to persuade Naboth, a God-fearing man, to hand over some vineyards in his possession. Jezebel assures her husband that she will see to it: "Then Jezebel his wife said to him: Thou art of great authority indeed, and governest well the kingdom of Israel. Arise, and eat bread, and be of good cheer, I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezrahelite" (1 Kings 21.7). She also arranges to have false witnesses declare Naboth guilty of blasphemy, for which the penalty is death.

⁷² Streete, *The Strange Woman* 63.

⁷³ The joint persecution of Praetextatus by Chilperic and Fredegund later falls to Fredegund alone, strengthening her relationship to the Biblical queen (*DLH* VII.31).

⁷⁴ *DLH* V.18, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 220.17-18. "Now we have the promise of all the bishops; only if you do not go against [us]."

⁷⁵ See Cooper, "Insinuations of womanly influence".

Now there was not such another as Achab, who was sold to do evil in the sight of the Lord: for his wife Jezebel set him on,⁷⁶

Chilperic is similarly described as committing nefarious deeds at the instigation of his wife. His persecution of Praetextatus is driven, we are told, by the desire to please her:

*‘quid nunc faciam, ut reginae de eo voluntas adimpleatur?’*⁷⁷

Later, he follows her suggestion to send his son Clovis – her step-son – to Berny in the hope that he might die of the epidemic raging there.⁷⁸

Stacey Klein suggests that Jezebel was “strongly associated in Biblical exegesis with a conception of monarchy centred on the absolute power of the king and on his exemption from the imperatives of godly authority or covenant law.”⁷⁹ This is surely also the case with Gregory’s characterisation of Chilperic and Fredegund. The bringing of bishops to trial, sometimes leading to their mistreatment,⁸⁰ the use of heavy taxation, including that of the church, the failure to respect rights of asylum, the utter inability to grasp the fact of the transience of worldly things, as well as the blindness to divine involvement in the world and therefore to the likely outcome of sinful action, all point to a sense of Chilperic and Fredegund as a royal couple who saw no power as being above their own. *DLH* VI.46 is full of this sense: gluttony, once again, indicates a devotion to

⁷⁶ I Kings 21.25

⁷⁷ *DLH* V.18, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 222.8. “Now what will I do, that the queen’s will may be done about him?”

⁷⁸ *DLH* V.39.

⁷⁹ *Ruling Women* 143-4.

⁸⁰ Also in Book V we come across Nantinus, count of Angoulême, who persecutes Heraclius, bishop of Bordeaux. One of his motives was to acquire church property (V.36).

the pleasures of the world, while the disrespect of bishops is clear. Chilperic, we are told, resented the wealth of the churches, and destroyed wills made in their favour.⁸¹

Jezebel encouraged both Ahab's desire for earthly gain – a form of idolatry in itself – and was the gateway for him into false religion.⁸² Not only did Chilperic expound his own ideas on the Trinity, which brought him dangerously close to heresy, as Gregory's strategically-placed chapter on his argument with a heretic suggests,⁸³ but he also appears to have been the contemporary Merovingian king most devoted to monetary gain.⁸⁴ He took Gregory aside in *DLH* VI.2 to show him the many treasures he had laid aside for the greater good of the Frankish kingdom; a venture that was nothing but folly, clearly illustrating Chilperic's lack of appreciation for the fact that the treasures of this world are merely fleeting, while those of the afterlife will be eternal. Fredegund encouraged her husband in his avarice, and had a similar liking for the display of wealth. When her daughter Rigunth's marriage train set out for Spain, it was laden with treasure; an interesting contrast to earlier princesses, who went south into Spain bedecked with the treasures of their faith.⁸⁵ Fredegund was at pains to reassure her husband that this wealth

⁸¹ *DLH* VI.46.

⁸² The very fact of Ahab's marriage to Jezebel introduces the worship of Baal into the royal court, and he entertains the idolatrous priests at his table. (I Kings 18.19) There is no mention of any erroneous religious belief on Fredegund's part while her husband is still alive, though see below, 161, n.127, for comments on her association with a soothsayer.

⁸³ *DLH* V.43. See chapter 3, 121-2 for a discussion of the significance of this chapter's position.

⁸⁴ In one of his rare references to the Eastern Empire, Gregory draws a comparison between Chilperic and Fredegund, and their Byzantine contemporaries Justin II and Sophia, as well as Justin's successor Tiberius. Justin, like Chilperic, was criticised for being influenced by his wife and for his conservative economic policies, (see L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527-1204* (London, 1994) 43-4) while the latter was praised for his open-handedness. This comparison would benefit from further investigation, which however falls outwith the scope of the current thesis.

⁸⁵ Clothild in *DLH* III.10, and Ingund in V.38.

came entirely from her own private coffers. She had clearly been storing up wealth with little thought for the eternal life, or the warning of Isaiah 5.8:

Woe to you that join house to house and lay field to field, even to the end of the place: shall you alone dwell in the midst of the earth?⁸⁶

Fredegund and her husband are presented as perfect accomplices.⁸⁷

The account of Naboth's vineyard can shed yet more light on Gregory's technique. Because of avarice, Ahab had coveted the vineyard, and Jezebel had obtained it for him. Later, recognising the misfortune befalling him as God's punishment, Ahab repented bitterly. Chilperic's attempts to increase taxation follow a similar route. In V.28, Gregory tells us that Chilperic had imposed a new, heavy taxation on the whole of his kingdom, which caused some people to leave their homes for other lands, despairing of ever being able to pay. In V.33, Gregory tells us of a series of natural disasters, which were followed by a plague of dysentery.⁸⁸ Gregory then describes the loss of young children to the pestilence, adopting a feminised register to emphasise the horror of this.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ C.f. *DLH* IV.24.

⁸⁷ It has a comic effect, this brief domestic wrangle over wealth which displays the failure of each to give thought to more important things. The comedy is only heightened when an axle on one of the wagons breaks, probably because it is too heavily laden. Covered with earthly glory and riches the royal couple may be, but even they cannot guard against such a mundane eventuality, or avert the misfortune it may signal.

⁸⁸ *DLH* V.34.

⁸⁹ *Perdedemus dulcis et caros nobis infantulos, quos aut gremiis fovimus aut ulnis baiolavimus aut propria manu, ministratis cibis, ipsos studio sagatiore nutritivimus* (*DLH* V.34, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 239.9-11). "Then we lost the little children, who were so sweet and dear to us, who we held on our laps or carried in our arms, who we fed and nourished with our own hands, with all the care and wisdom that we had". Stacey Klein discusses the adoption by male writers of a woman's voice as a literary device in her *Ruling Women*: "Writing about women or encouraging readers to view social formations through the eyes of women was a powerful tool, and one that Anglo-Saxon writers drew on consistently, for social critique."

Of course, all these signs and disasters have long since been appreciated for their true significance by Gregory:

*..nullum paenitus incitamentum habens ignis alieni, forsitan iussione divina.*⁹⁰

The Merovingian royal couple, like the Biblical, had not been without the warnings of prophets. But it takes the sickness and death of the royal children to bring things home to Chilperic and Fredegund, and it is Fredegund who makes the connection. Her words make clear that she has acted as her husband's partner in the crime of amassing riches, and she is therefore as responsible for the unjust taxation and fruitless gathering of treasure as her husband. Her speech, as imagined by Gregory in *DLH* V.34, has been noted as bearing a strong relationship to Gregory's comments in the Preface to the Book.⁹¹ Guy Halsall has examined the rhetorical devices used in the Preface, invoking the rhetorical device of *chiasmus* to analyse its structure. However, Fredegund's speech has not been fully examined nor its significance explained. While Halsall notes the echoes in Fredegund's speech,⁹² he fails to observe that hers, too, follows a similar structure, with mirrored statements arranged around the central idea. The mirrored ideas are (1) the warnings of God, (mirrored by the risk of eternal damnation); (2) the loss of children; (3) the superfluity of wealth, now that there is no-one to leave it to (this is echoed by a reference to the wealth of King Chlothar, which he in his turn had left to them); (4) a reference to the evil of their acquisitiveness (echoed by the call to burn the *discriptionis iniquas*). The speech's central idea (5) directly echoes Gregory's accusation

⁹⁰ *DLH* V.33, *MGH SSRM*, 238.13-14. "there was no other apparent cause of the fire, perhaps it occurred by divine command."

⁹¹ See Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 43, Halsall, "The Preface to Book V" 303-4.

⁹² "The Preface to Book V" 303. See also Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 43.

in the Preface, that the kings already have more than enough wealth, with wine and grain stores filled to bursting point, and vast stores of treasure.⁹³ We may tabulate these as follows:⁹⁴

1	<i>The divine mercy</i> hath long borne with us in our misdeeds; oft we have been seized with fevers and other ills, but there hath followed no amendment.
2	And lo! <i>Now we lose our sons</i> ; lo! Now they are slain by the tears of the poor, by the lamentations of widows, by the sighs of orphans,
3	<i>nor is there any object now left to us for which we may amass riches.</i> We lay up treasures without knowing for whom we gather them together. Behold now our treasures are without an owner,
4	<i>having the taint of things plundered and accursed.</i>
5 (central idea)	<i>Were not our store chambers full of wine, our granaries of corn? were not our treasures filled with gold, with silver and precious stones, with necklaces and other royal ornaments.</i>
4	And lo! now we lose that which was loveliest of all that was ours. Come, therefore, if thou wilt, let us burn all the <i>unjust tax lists</i> ;
3	let that be sufficient for our treasury which sufficed thy sire, <i>King Lothar</i> , <i>before us.</i>

⁹³ *Numquid non exundabant prumptuaria vino? Numquid non horrea replebantur frumento? Numquid non erant thesauri referti auro, argento, lapidibus praeciosis, monilibus vel reliquis imperialibus ornamentis?* (DLH V.34, MGH SSRM I.I, 240.5-7). “Did we not have an abundance of wine in our chambers? Were our barns not filled with corn? Were our treasures not filled with gold, silver, precious stones, jewels and other regal ornaments?” Compare with “*In domibus dilitiae supercrescunt, in prumtuariis vinum, triticum oleumque redundat, in thesauris aurum atque argentum coacervatur*” from DLH V.Pref. (MGH SSRM I.1 193.14-16). “You have an abundance of delightful things in your houses, your chambers filled with corn, wine and oil, your treasures crowded with gold and silver.” Fredegund’s words, rather than merely echoing Gregory’s, amplify them.

⁹⁴ The translations are from Dalton, *History of the Franks*, 205-6.

2	“What are you waiting for?” she asked “Do what you see me doing!” <i>We may still lose our children,</i>
1	but we shall at least escape <i>eternal damnation.</i>

The structural and thematic echoes of the Preface to Book V strongly suggest that this speech is intended to serve as a counterpart to the earlier passage; its purpose is not to simply highlight the importance of the Preface. Fredegund speaks here as one half of the royal couple, and her imagined recognition of the justice of their punishment vindicates Gregory’s comments in the Preface. This acknowledgment is vital, highlighting Gregory’s prescience for the benefit of his readers.⁹⁵ As Fredegund has encouraged her husband’s greed through poor counsel, she now advises that they must take a rather different path. No amount of treasure has saved the royal children, who have perished along with the children of the poor. Chilperic demonstrates his acceptance of Fredegund’s analysis, and therefore affirms for the reader the truth of Gregory’s prediction, by joining his wife in burning the tax registers, and taking steps to prevent further unfair tax assessments.

That Gregory would model the cast of his *DLH* on Biblical figures is to be expected. Perhaps less obviously, he drew on the largely Roman stereotype of the wicked

⁹⁵ This is not the only time that Gregory makes use of a third party to deliver a moral punchline. In *DLH* III.4, when Sigismund of Burgundy has his son murdered at the suggestion of his second wife, the boy’s stepmother, his instant regret and grief are castigated by an old man, who points out that he only has himself to blame (see Chapter 2, 67-8)).

stepmother.⁹⁶ In the second chapter of this thesis a story concerning the Burgundian King Sigismund was briefly discussed.⁹⁷ He was persuaded to murder his own son by his second wife, the boy's stepmother. Gregory tells us that Sigismund's second wife began to turn against her step-son, "as is the way of step-mothers".⁹⁸ This appears to need no further explanation. Clearly, Gregory expected "the way of stepmothers" to be a recognisable fact for his readers. The word he uses is *noverca*, a word with a significant legacy in antiquity.⁹⁹ Linguistically, it is related to the word for "new".¹⁰⁰ Patricia Watson has pointed out the negative associations of newness in a conservative society like that of Ancient Rome. These connotations attach themselves to the *noverca*; she is an outsider who will introduce an unwelcome new regime into the household.¹⁰¹ Ideas about stepmothers are hardly exclusive to Ancient Rome, but the figure of the stepmother appears to take on a life of its own in Roman society, as a stock rhetorical character. It was thought to be self-evident that a stepmother would hate her stepchildren, and would act against them and attempt to cause trouble between them and their father, her husband.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ See the review of ancient ideas about the stepmother in M. J. G. Gray-Fow, "The Wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: An Evaluation" *Latomus* 47 (1988) 741-57.

⁹⁷ *DLH* III.5 (see above, 67-8).

⁹⁸ "...sicut novercarum mos est" (*DLH* III.5, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 100.17 – 101.1).

⁹⁹ There was a precedent in the Old Testament as well. This was Bathsheba, who, like Fredegund, took aggressive steps to clear the way for her son. She arranged for Adonijah, King David's heir, to be usurped, in order to allow her own son, Solomon, to inherit (I Kings 1.15-53). Like Clovis, Adonijah had been drawing attention to himself by presumptuously celebrating his impending kingship.

¹⁰⁰ *novus* –a –um: the words share the root *nov*.

¹⁰¹ Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers* 15.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 3.

Gregory uses the word *noverca* on only three occasions in the *DLH* aside from III.5;¹⁰³ twice in association with Fredegund. (*DLH* V.14 and V.39) On both occasions, the context is that one of Fredegund's stepsons has been insulting her. Perhaps surprisingly, given the broadness of his assumption on stepmotherly attributes in III.5, Gregory does not on either occasion specifically associate Fredegund's reaction with a typical stepmother's attitude towards her stepson. However, given the subsequent deaths of both Merovech and Clovis – particularly in the case of Clovis, where retribution is swift – it is probable that the reader was expected to make the connection him/herself.¹⁰⁴

One final, but I believe vital, issue to be taken into account when evaluating the image of Fredegund in the *DLH* was suggested towards the end of the previous chapter. Gregory was concerned about Chilperic's stance on orthodoxy. He alludes to this directly only once, but other evidence suggests that Gregory was in fact deeply anxious. Once again, Fredegund is vital here. Her behaviour bears a strong resemblance to that of the Arians Amalaberg, Amalasuntha and Goiswinth. As was discussed in the previous chapter, these women are presented as acting outwith the norms of Gallic female behaviour: Amalaberg goads her husband into war;¹⁰⁵ Amalasuntha ignores parental injunctions and marries a slave, and eventually kills her mother with poison;¹⁰⁶ Goiswinth

¹⁰³ King Guntram's second wife Marcatrude is not explicitly labelled as a stepmother, but her behaviour rather speaks for itself. She became jealous of Gundobad, Guntram's son by his first wife, Veneranda, and poisoned him, *ut aiunt* (*DLH* IV.25, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 156.16-19).

¹⁰⁴ Gregory was not the only early mediaeval writer to pick up on Roman assumptions about stepmothers. The word *noverca* is also used by Jordanes in his *History of the Goths*. He tells us that the Amazons would leave their male children to die of exposure, with stepmotherly hatred. (*sive, ut quibusdam placet, editis maribus novercali odio infantis miserandi fata rumpebant* (Jordanes, *Getica*, VIII, *MGH AA* V.1 69.12-13).

¹⁰⁵ See above, 83, 123.

¹⁰⁶ See above, 94-5, 123-6.

is violent, and persecutes her daughter-in-law as well as personally instigating oppression of the Catholic Christians in Spain.¹⁰⁷ Fredegund is presented as having undue influence over her husband,¹⁰⁸ as carrying out abuses against individuals apparently without her husband's input, including persecutions of clerics.¹⁰⁹ She also, like Amalasuntha, uses poison.¹¹⁰ She is violent and out-of-control.¹¹¹ There is even a suggestion of sexual profligacy around the Berny-Rivière trial, although as we will see, this particular slur was viewed by Chilperic as simply beyond the pale, and Gregory took swift and anxious steps to distance himself from the original accusation.

Changing images

The trial of Praetextatus was the great dramatic set-piece which established Gregory's position *vis-à-vis* the royal couple. They would now understand the character of the man they were dealing with. Gregory himself was brought to trial at Berny-Rivière in 580, charged with spreading the slanderous rumour that Fredegund had been having an affair with Bishop Bertram of Bordeaux. This trial, while crucial in its own way, did not have the same significance for the relationship between Gregory and the king and queen.¹¹² Gregory's real opponent here, as indicated at the start of both chapters 48 and

¹⁰⁷ See above, 117, 122-3.

¹⁰⁸ *DLH* V.18, 39.

¹⁰⁹ *DLH* IV.51, V.39, VIII.31, 42.

¹¹⁰ *DLH* IV.51, VIII.29, 31

¹¹¹ *DLH* IX.34. This is her attack on Rigunth, when the latter was almost throttled by the heavy lid of a treasure chest. Fredegund also ordered many acts of violence to be carried out on her behalf.

¹¹² While Gregory's account of his trial and the events which surrounded it is peppered with Biblical quotations, it lacks the dramatic and dignified set-piece speeches of the earlier trial.

49 of Book V, was the count Leudast.¹¹³ The trial revealed that Fredegund's true adversaries – those who had originated the slander – were a group of men, including Leudast, who had surrounded Clovis, and planned to drive Fredegund from court, assassinate her sons and elevate Clovis to the throne.¹¹⁴ The significance of Berny-Rivière for Gregory was to make clear that he still had enemies at Tours. If his depiction of Chilperic seems a little more subdued from this point, it is not because of fear of the king himself: if Chilperic were to find that Gregory was associated with slanderous comments, he would have little choice but to dispose of him; his own status, and his followers, would demand nothing less. Leudast, his plot discovered, was forced to seek sanctuary at the church of St Hilary at Poitiers, where he engaged in many of the activities Gregory deplored in his fellow man, including fornicating in the church's doorway.¹¹⁵ Fredegund shared Gregory's disgust at this behaviour, and had him expelled.¹¹⁶ By reporting on Fredegund's reaction in this manner, Gregory distances himself from the original slanderous accusations against the queen. He makes clear that in his eyes she is a virtuous woman, not only faithful to her husband but actually abhorring sexual misdemeanour. The anecdote also very effectively identifies Leudast as the mutual enemy.

Gregory went to some lengths to create the character of Fredegund, and exploited stereotypes and concerns surrounding the figure of the king's wife to make her a carefully

¹¹³ Cf. Heinzelmann, 47-8.

¹¹⁴ Chilperic in fact knew that Gregory was innocent before the trial began (Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 46-8).

¹¹⁵ *DLH* V.49, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 262.32.

¹¹⁶ *DLH* V.49, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 262.32 – 263.1-2.

matched counterpart to Chilperic. However, as is true of the king, her portrait is not uniform. Some time after the trial at Berny-Rivière, she communicated with Gregory, apparently in civil terms, on the topic of how Leudast was to be treated.¹¹⁷ There seems no reason to suppose that when he followed her instructions on this score he did so out of fear rather than simply respect for her wishes. Her objection to Leudast's behaviour at the church of St Hilary reveals that she had some level of religious sensibility, and this appears to have been one of her motivations, even if it was often overridden by others. Gregory can only have viewed this sensibility as admirable.

Just as Gregory seized the opportunity of contact with heretics to define his orthodoxy, he appears to have relished locking horns with a king like Chilperic, who had a robust, even aggressive, approach to the establishment of his own authority. His pursuit of wealth provided the perfect counter to Gregory's insistence on the pre-eminence of spiritual treasures. Fredegund all but disappears in Book VI. This is surely because the character of the "wicked queen" was no longer required for the time being: the trial of Praetextatus had allowed Gregory to increase his standing amongst his fellow bishops, and made clear to Chilperic that the bishop of Tours was not a man to be bought, or trifled with. Berny-Rivière, on the other hand, had revealed the lingering insecurities of Gregory's position. His own image in the *DLH*, unsurprisingly, also loses some of its bombast from this point.

¹¹⁷ *DLH* V.49, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 302.8-11.

The rather more rounded portrayal of Chilperic found in Book VI also coincides a change in political circumstances, specifically, with an alliance between Childebert and Chilperic, formed in 581.¹¹⁸ Gregory may have played a vital part in the formation of the Neustrian-Austrasian alliance, acting as envoy between the two kings.¹¹⁹ As he had originally been placed at Tours by Sigibert, so he continued to serve the Austrasian kings. His attitude thus reflected the policy of the king he served.¹²⁰

Halsall notes a distinct change of attitude towards Chilperic in Book VI.¹²¹ He is still far from the ideal monarch, but there are glimpses of positivity: he is involved, alongside Gregory, in the attempted conversion of a Jew.¹²² He is unsuccessful, but this does not in itself reflect negatively on the king; Gregory himself had failed to convert the Arian Agilan, despite his best efforts at persuasion.¹²³ We also hear no more about Chilperic's theological forays. In Book VI, Fredegund's rate of activity falls considerably. She is mentioned by name in only one chapter, in the account of Leudast's death, and her portrait here is not especially morally tainted.

As Chilperic was for the time being no longer playing the role of Ahab, he no longer needed his Jezebel. It seems that, while she had some purpose in the creation of a

¹¹⁸ *DLH* VI.1.

¹¹⁹ He was present at Nogent-sur-Marne when Childebert's men, including Egidius of Rheims, arrived to talk terms (*DLH* VI.2).

¹²⁰ The level of Gregory's involvement in contemporary politics is one of the most hotly contested topics in Gregory scholarship. See A. C. Murray, *Gregory of Tours: The Merovingians* xviii-xix for a brief outline of the two sides of the debate.

¹²¹ "Nero and Herod?" 342-343.

¹²² *DLH* VI.5.

¹²³ *DLH* V.43.

negative portrayal of her husband, she was of little use when this negative portrait was no longer necessary.¹²⁴ The situation would change dramatically after the death of Chilperic in 584.

Chilperic's widow

DLH VI.46 has much to answer for. Despite the more nuanced portrayal of Chilperic in the rest of the Book, this one searing little piece of invective is commonly used to judge the king. It has been interpreted as a bilious outpouring of relief after the king's death allowed Gregory to speak his mind: Guy Halsall offers an alternative view, positing that this chapter in fact represents Gregory's attempt to distance himself from Chilperic and from the Austrasian-Neustrian alliance that following Chilperic's death had been rendered useless.

This alliance was to prove embarrassing after Chilperic's death, and the attempt to cancel out its effect led to a rewriting of history. In 590, the bishop Egidius of Rheims, who was involved in the negotiations between Chilperic and Childebert, was condemned by trial as a traitor. During this trial we see Chilperic described as *semper inimicus*;¹²⁵ which is plainly untrue. The former alliance was also potentially detrimental to the new Austrasian policy, which was to attempt to secure an alliance with Guntram instead.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Indeed, it seems that one of Gregory's favourite ways of discrediting a king is to portray him as being susceptible to the negative influence of a woman (see chapter two 66-8, chapter 3 123). When he wishes to portray kings positively, their consorts rarely appear at all. As we have seen, King Guntram was manipulated by his wife to grave effect (chapter two 58, n.38). Women do not feature in the part of his life which coincides with Gregory's more positive appraisal of him.

¹²⁵ *DLH* X.19, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 510.20.

¹²⁶ Halsall, "Nero and Herod?" 346-7.

Halsall's suggested review of Gregory's attitude towards Chilperic, and the former's involvement in the Austrasian-Neustrian alliance, clearly has implications for the traditional view of Fredegund. I would like to suggest that, from Book VII onwards, Gregory found good reason to revive the image of the evil royal couple – Chilperic and Fredegund – against whom he could define himself. Taking on board Halsall's suggestion that Gregory acted as "Childebert's man" in attempts to establish a truce between the young king and his Uncle Guntram, I would like to suggest that Fredegund's evil character in Books VII and VIII was partially a politically expedient creation: that she became a lightning-rod for the tensions that had existed between Chilperic and Guntram. Thus, just as Gregory's attitude towards Chilperic as represented in the *DLH* was in part a reflection of Austrasian policy, so too was his attitude towards Fredegund.

It is plain that in the period between Chilperic's death and the confirmation of the Treaty of Andelot in November 587 – and even after this point – Childebert and Guntram had a difficult relationship. In 584, shortly after Chilperic's death, Childebert made an attempt to secure an alliance with Guntram, which was swiftly rebuffed.¹²⁷ What happens next is interesting: a new set of envoys from Childebert appeared and demanded the surrender of Fredegund, who had sought Guntram's protection,¹²⁸ giving a catalogue of her crimes: she was guilty of the deaths of Galswith, of her stepsons, Clovis and

¹²⁷ *DLH* VII.6.

¹²⁸ And evidently being treated with some respect, dining at the king's table, and Guntram is reluctant to believe the charges against her. A comparison with the fate of one of Charibert's queens gives an interesting parallel. Theudechild, like Fredegund, had been widowed, and sent envoys to Guntram, asking for protection and offering herself in marriage. Guntram replied positively, but when she went to him, he packed her off to a monastery, taking her treasure for himself, and declaring that she had been unworthy of his brother (*DLH* IV.26). Fredegund did not apparently offer herself in marriage, but presumably involuntary monastic vocation was a career he could have made available to her as well. For whatever reason, he chose instead to support her and her young son.

Merovech, and the kings Sigibert and her own husband, Chilperic.¹²⁹ This is the first time that the *DLH* alludes to Fredegund's responsibility for the deaths of Galswinth and Chilperic.¹³⁰ Fredegund's character, like that of her husband, has suffered from a retrospective reading: just as Chilperic's character has been read backwards from *DLH* VI.46, so Fredegund's has been read in reverse from the list of murders given by Childebert's envoy in VII.7.

Having Guntram accept Fredegund as a common enemy – which he appeared to have been highly reluctant to do in the years following Chilperic's death – was a necessary step in the formation of an alliance between Guntram and Childebert. Guntram's acknowledgment of Fredegund as the murderess who stood as a common threat to both the Guntram and Childebert factions was crucial. Gregory's portrayal of Fredegund is heavily skewed by this necessity, and by the fact that he had been a protégé of Brunhild; a woman who appears to have had far more focused political ambitions than her famous enemy, and who was mistrusted by Guntram accordingly.

Books VII to X are very critical of Chilperic, while Guntram is frequently eulogised as an ideal king:¹³¹ pious, just, and saintly to such a degree that he could even

¹²⁹ *'Redde homicidam, quae amitam meam suggillavit, quae patrem interfecit et patruum, quae ipsus quoque consobrinus meus gladio interemit'* (*DLH* VII.7 *MGH SSRM* I.1, 329.21-22 – 230.1). "Give me the murderer, who garrotted my aunt, who killed my father and my uncle, and who slew my cousins with the sword."

¹³⁰ Although Gregory had mentioned that she was not present at his burial, which may insinuate that she did not care, or that she was in some way responsible. In reality, it was probably more an issue of safety.

¹³¹ Halsall, "Nero and Herod" 348. "Just as Chilperic's image is usually read backwards from *DLH* VI.46, Guntram's is usually seen retrospectively from Gregory's open eulogies in Books 7-10" (*Ibid.* 343). So cautions Halsall against the use of these chapters as ready and useful summaries, rather than highly

turn out the odd miracle. It is also from Book VII onwards that Gregory's Fredegund truly becomes the caricature of the evil queen who has become so familiar. Gregory once again makes use of the antetype of Jezebel, dropping sly hints about Fredegund's sexual behaviour.¹³² These hints were designed to cast doubt on the paternity of her small son, Chlothar, with the intention of pouring cold water on Guntram's desire to form an alliance with the young prince and his mother. According to Gregory's presentation, her homicidal inclinations also stepped up a gear. She relentlessly pursued Praetextatus, apparently in revenge for the bishop's support of Merovech.¹³³ When Praetextatus pointed out that she would be nothing without her son,¹³⁴ she appears to have detected a threat, or at least an affront to her dignity. Her response was to have the bishop murdered. She was quickly accused, but took steps to contain the threat, arranging for the murder of her main accuser, another bishop. It was also at this time that her hatred of Brunhild intensified, and she sent assassins in an attempt to rid herself of both her rival and

circumstantial, self contained pieces requiring the same cautious handling that characterises the unpicking of more controversial excerpts.

¹³² Halsall notes that Fredegund is only accused of sexual impropriety by Gregory himself after Chilperic's death, perhaps because it was only after this time that she actually began to take lovers (Halsall, "Nero and Herod" 349, n.52). Sexual slander was a standard way of criticising a woman; particularly a powerful one. It was also, by extension, a criticism of her husband. See the essays in B. Garlick, S. Dixon and P. Allen eds., *Stereotypes of Women in Power*, and in particular P. Allen, "Contemporary Portrayals of the Byzantine Empress Theodora (A.D. 527-548)" 93-104. Another connection with Jezebel concerns religious irregularities. During Chilperic's lifetime, Fredegund's orthodoxy was not questioned. However, in VII.44 we learn of a female soothsayer who had managed to make a fortune through identifying the culprits of various crimes. Bishop Ageric of Verdun decreed that the woman was in fact possessed by an *inmundus spiritus*.¹³² Realising that she risked persecution if she stayed in the area of Verdun, she went for safety to Fredegund at Rueil. At first sight a fairly neutral episode as far as Fredegund is concerned, it actually manages to taint the queen by association, with the suspicion of unorthodox religious practices. If Fredegund would shelter such a woman, she cannot have objected to her behaviour. The connection with Jezebel is thus strengthened.

¹³³ See above 142.

¹³⁴ *'Ego semper et in exilio et extra exilium episcopus fui, sum et ero; nam tu non semper regalem potentiam perfrueres. Nos ab exilio provehimur, tribuente Deo, in regnum; tu vero ab hoc regno demergeris in abyssum'* (DLH VIII.30, MGH SSRM I.1, 397.5-8). "I am and always have been a bishop, in and out of exile, and always will be, but you will not always enjoy royal power. God has granted that I be returned from exile to my kingdom, but you will be thrust down from your kingdom into the abyss."

Childebert. Brunhild, in contrast, is the image of magnanimity, graciously forgiving an assassin and sending him back to his mistress, who had him tortured for his failure.¹³⁵

In VII.14, we are witness to another of Childebert's attempts to secure from Guntram the territories which had belonged to his father. Once again, the attempt was rejected. The pattern of the previous attempt was repeated: once more, the envoys withdrew, only to return with a request that Fredegund be surrendered. Her crimes were reiterated, but Guntram retorted:

*'Sed et ea quae contra illam adseretes, vera esse non credo.'*¹³⁶

I would suggest that there is some rhetorical significance to this exchange. Fredegund was of little practical use to Childebert, beyond the satisfaction he could get from punishing her for her many supposed crimes. However, by agreeing that she was a murderess, Guntram would have been giving his consent to naming her as a scapegoat. Thus Chilperic's faction could be blamed for the tensions of the past, the former Austrasian-Neustrian alliance could have been forgotten, and Childebert and Guntram could have moved towards their own alliance. However, Guntram was not ready for this just yet. The title of the next chapter - *De malitia Fredegunde*¹³⁷ - may be a reflection of Gregory's frustrations at this latest failure.

¹³⁵ Dalton uses this incident to highlight the differences in character between the two women (notes to *History of the Franks* 565). Something is a little amiss with the account, however, as Dalton hints: "[t]he cleric himself seems to have been strangely ill-informed of Fredegund's nature, or he would never have been foolish enough to go back."

¹³⁶ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 335.15. "But the things which you assert against her I do not believe to be true."

¹³⁷ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 322, 1.9.

Relations between Guntram and Childebert were further complicated by the Gundovald episode.¹³⁸ Gundovald was a pretender to the Merovingian throne who tried to fill the power vacuum left by the death of Chilperic in 584. He appears to have done so with the encouragement of the Austrasian nobility. VII.26 sees him extracting oaths: in towns that belonged to Guntram, he took oaths for himself, while in those that had belonged to Sigibert, he took them on behalf of Childebert. Clearly, he saw himself as acting in league with the young king. Working to contain this threat, Guntram in 585 named his nephew as his heir. He remained deeply suspicious of Brunhild, however, and warned Childebert to give her no opportunity to communicate with the Ballomer, as Gundovald was nicknamed.¹³⁹ Guntram was later to voice a wild suspicion that Brunhild had sent Gundovald an offer of marriage.¹⁴⁰

In 588, IX.20, Gregory was commanded to act as an envoy from Childebert to Guntram. Gregory passed on Childebert's thanks for Guntram's continued pious advice, and gave a promise that the young king would never break any of the terms of the pact that the two had made, on 28th November 587.¹⁴¹ At first, Guntram was reluctant to give a friendly response, complaining that Childebert had withheld his share in the city of Senlis, and had also retained in his kingdom several of Guntram's enemies, with whom he wished to deal. Gregory promised to relay these concerns to Childebert, whereupon Guntram ordered that the Treaty of Andelot be re-read in the presence of all. This act

¹³⁸ See Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family" 161-2 for the implications of Gundovald's career in interpreting Merovingian attitudes to rejection and recognition of paternity.

¹³⁹ *DLH* VII.33.

¹⁴⁰ *DLH* IX.28.

¹⁴¹ The Treaty of Andelot.

seemed to satisfy him, and he asked Felix, the Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne who had accompanied Gregory on his mission:

*'Dic, o Filex, iam enim plenissime conexuistis amicitias inter sororem
meam Brunichildem et inimicam Dei atque hominum Fredegundem?'*¹⁴²

Guntram was making sure that no trace of the alliance between the house of Sigibert and Childebert and that of Chilperic remained. Gregory replied to him in the negative, and then said:

*'Utinam tu, o rex gloriosissime, minus cum eam caritatem haberes!
Nam, ut saepe cognovimus, dignius eius legationem quam nostram
excepis.'*¹⁴³

By "ours", he meant Childebert / Brunhild's party, of which he was a member.

Guntram's response was the one Childebert's envoys had been waiting for:

*'Nam ibi amicitias legare non possum, de qua saepius processerunt, qui
mihi vitam praesentem auferrent.'*¹⁴⁴

He had accepted Fredegund as a scapegoat, and the alliance could now move forward.

The envoys took this positive sign as a chance to push forward on a few other issues, such as the proposed marriage between the Visigoth Reccared and Childebert's sister Clodosind, to which Guntram replied that if Childebert fulfilled all the terms of the treaty, he would give his consent. The envoys also asked for Guntram's aid in a venture

¹⁴² DLH IX.20, MGH SSRM I.1, 439.17-18. "Tell me Felix, have you in fact joined fully in friendship my sister Brunhild and the enemy of God and man Fredegund?"

¹⁴³ DLH IX.20, MGH SSRM I.1, 439.21-23. "I wish, glorious king, that you were less charitable towards [Fredegund]. For, as we have often noticed, you receive her embassies with greater honour than ours."

¹⁴⁴ DLH IX.20, MGH SSRM I.1, 439.24-25. "For I cannot give friendship to one who has often sent forth her men to take my life."

against the Lombards. This, however, Guntram refused. The final issue was that of the proposed church council. Gregory expressed the objection of many churchmen, that there was no need to have a national council as there were no matters of national import to be dealt with. Guntram responded that there were many matters needing discussion, not least the murder of Praetextatus, and many issues of general morality demanded attention. Heinzelmann suggests that Gregory was hugely impressed with this speech, that it confirmed his opinion of Guntram as a godly king.¹⁴⁵ The result was the eulogies of the latter part of *DLH* IX.20, and IX.21, where Guntram talks of God, and is described as fasting, making generous charitable donations and even performing a miracle.

Halsall, by contrast, dismisses this description as an insurance policy.¹⁴⁶ Guntram had proved to be highly dangerous when in pursuit of those who had opposed him, and the purges were not over yet. Such passages, Halsall suggests, allowed Gregory to continue writing in the same way as before, with anecdotes that readers would recognise as revealing the less praiseworthy aspects of Guntram's character. Should his work be seized, however, he could point to passages praising Guntram and deny any charges of disloyalty.

I would like to suggest a middle ground. It is no coincidence that the description of Guntram as a near-saint comes after the sealing of an alliance between Childebert and Guntram. It represents relief on Gregory's part that the community at Tours would no longer be under threat, as Guntram had accepted that it belonged to Childebert. Guntram

¹⁴⁵ *Gregory of Tours* 69.

¹⁴⁶ "Nero and Herod?" 349.

had accepted the mutual interest of the two parties, after protracted negotiation. It may also have reflected the relief of the Austrasians, who appear to have adopted an increasingly deferential attitude towards Guntram as his intentions to eradicate all sources of opposition - or even those guilty of crimes against his brothers, who had once been his own enemies - became more obvious.¹⁴⁷ This interpretation allows that Gregory had begun to feel real admiration, or at least a cautious respect, for the king at this point, while taking issue with the idea that he saw him as a uniformly godly king. It also absolves him of the kind of cynicism that would see him writing whole chapters as an insurance against being caught out.

His admiration was lasting. In X.28, Fredegund makes her final appearance in the *DLH*. In 591, Guntram acceded to her request to receive her son Chlothar from the baptismal font. Childebert expressed concerns that this action would lead Guntram to renege on the terms of their treaty. Gregory quotes Guntram's reply, apparently with approval.¹⁴⁸ It is his Christian duty to receive a blood relative from the font, and to refuse to do so would be to risk the divine wrath. Perhaps Gregory saw the occasion as auguring

¹⁴⁷ In *DLH* VIII.5 Gregory and Guntram relate similar visions about Chilperic in hell. Gregory encourages Guntram to interpret the dream in the same way as he himself has done: it proves that Chilperic was the architect of his own misfortune, and that seeking vengeance on his behalf would be pointless. Guntram had just announced his intention to pursue Bishop Theodore of Marseilles for his part in Chilperic's murder, as Guntram perceived it. Gregory cannot have been alone in seeing as highly dangerous Guntram's determination to seek out and punish all those guilty of past crimes.

¹⁴⁸ *'Promissionem, quam in nepotem meum Childeberthum regem statutam habeo, non obmitto. Nam illum non oportet scandalizare, si consubrinum eius, filium fratris mei, de sancto suscipiam lavacro, quia hanc petitionem nullus christianorum debet abnuere. Eamque ego, ut Deus manifestissime novit, non calliditate aliqua, sed in simplicitate puri cordis agere cupio, quia offensam Divinitatis incurrere formido'* (*DLH* X.28, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 521.12-17). "I shall not be false to the promise I made by royal decree to my nephew Childebert. There is no need for him to be offended if I receive his cousin from the holy font, because this request is one that no Christian should refuse. I wish to act, as God knows most plainly, not out of some cunning, but with the simplicity of a pure heart, for if I dismiss the request, I fear to incur the offence of the Divine."

a lasting peace.¹⁴⁹ Goffart and Heinzelmann both opine that Gregory was sceptical about this event,¹⁵⁰ but the lesson of Berny-Rivière was for Gregory a lasting one. Guntram's sponsoring of his young nephew at the baptismal font represented a formal acknowledgement of Chlothar's legitimacy. Further questioning of the boy's parentage was unthinkable. In narrative terms, this event, symbolic of truce, allowed Gregory to bring to a close his account of the wars of kings, shortly before concluding the *DLH* as a whole.

Finding Fredegund: sex and violence

Gregory clearly manipulated his portrayal of Fredegund in order to fulfil certain literary and political ends. Reading around Gregory's image of the queen, it is possible to discern competing sets of gender norms, which together build up a picture of the challenges which faced a Merovingian queen in the latter half of the sixth century. This may be the closest we can get to the "real", historical Fredegund.

We know that the position of queen was not a secure one.¹⁵¹ Merovingian kings took on and discarded consorts at will, and while the family connections offered by noble or royal birth might be no guarantee of safety, the former slave who had fallen from her husband's favour was in a still more precarious position. We hear nothing of a formal union between Fredegund and Chilperic. After ousting Audovera, Fredegund was herself

¹⁴⁹ Reydellet, *La Royauté*, 427 f.

¹⁵⁰ Goffart, *Narrators* 185-6; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 83-4.

¹⁵¹ See Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers* 74-96.

put aside to make way for Chilperic's princess-bride, Galswinth.¹⁵² When Fredegund once more returned to Chilperic's bed after Galswinth's murder, her place was, as far as we are aware, permanent. Her behaviour towards her stepsons suggests, however, that she always felt some measure of insecurity.

A queen might reasonably expect to gain some measure of security by bearing her husband a son. However, the Merovingians of the sixth century were not in the practice of designating heirs, and several, including Chilperic, had several wives. Gregory tells us that all children of a Merovingian king were considered to have royal blood.¹⁵³ This meant, in practice, that all surviving sons of the previous incumbent might have a claim on the kingship. In such a system, none of the king's sons was given any special status. One way to ensure that this was the case was to give no special status to the princes' mothers.¹⁵⁴ The second chapter of this thesis suggested that there may through the sixth century have been, if not a requirement, then a certain expectation for kings to prove themselves through acts of war.¹⁵⁵ Fighting in campaigns allowed princes to gain and prove themselves to bands of followers who would then support them in any bid for the throne. Fredegund's stepsons were older than her own. In 573, Theudebert, Chilperic's oldest son, was old enough to be sent on campaign to invade several of Sigibert's cities

¹⁵² *DLH* IV.28.

¹⁵³ *DLH* V.20, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 228.

¹⁵⁴ Nelson, "Medieval Queenship" 183. Conversely, the designation of an heir, even in the case of a king who was serially monogamous "made clear which royal wife was to be the king's mother" (P. Stafford, "Queens and Queenship", in P. Stafford ed., *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c.500-1100* (Blackwell Publishing, 2009) 467.

¹⁵⁵ This is what remained of the elective monarchies of the previous century (Nelson, "Medieval Queenship" 183).

south of the Loire.¹⁵⁶ Two years later, Merovech was similarly sent on campaign, this time to Poitiers.¹⁵⁷ Of Fredegund's sons at this time, Samson was born while Chilperic was being besieged at Tournai in 575;¹⁵⁸ the next, Dagobert, fell ill in 580 while still unbaptized;¹⁵⁹ though Chlodobert was somewhat older,¹⁶⁰ he had not yet had the opportunity to lead a campaign. Fredegund's stepsons therefore had a considerable head-start in building up a band of followers who might assist them in the event of their father's death.

Naturally, Fredegund wished that at least one of her sons would become a king. Lacking any definite security through her marriage, as queen-mother she would enjoy a far stronger position. Thus she took measures to remove her stepsons, rivals to her own children. She allegedly supported Guntram Boso because he had killed Theudebert in 575,¹⁶¹ and she attempted to have Merovech killed.¹⁶² Some of her actions were defensive: Gregory's trial at Berny-Rivière in 580 was configured in order to bring to book those who had accused Fredegund of infidelity. The accusation may have carried an acute threat because she may have been pregnant during the trial.¹⁶³ As we have seen, the course of the trial uncovered a plot to have Fredegund removed from court, to kill her

¹⁵⁶ *DLH* IV.47.

¹⁵⁷ *DLH* V.2.

¹⁵⁸ *DLH* V.22.

¹⁵⁹ *DLH* V.34.

¹⁶⁰ Fortunatus's epitaph tells us that the prince had died not long after his fifteenth birthday (*Carmen* 9.4).

¹⁶¹ *DLH* V.14.

¹⁶² By offering a reward to Guntram Boso if he would entice Merovech out of St. Martin's Church, where he had claimed sanctuary, and into an ambush (*DLH* V.14).

¹⁶³ See Smith, "Carrying the cares of state" 238. The anxiety was particularly acute because, as Gregory and no doubt many others were aware, there was good reason to doubt that Chilperic was the biological father of this particular child (see Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family" 163-4).

sons and to elevate Clovis to the kingship.¹⁶⁴ Fredegund's sons died in an epidemic of dysentery a matter of weeks after the end of the trial,¹⁶⁵ leaving her stepson Clovis as Chilperic's only surviving heir. We are told that he made "unforgivable" remarks about his stepmother, and rejoiced in the fact that he was his father's sole heir.¹⁶⁶ Fredegund may have interpreted his words as a direct threat. Did he intend to ensure that he remained the sole heir? She was informed that Clovis was attracted to one of her servants. Little wonder that she was so concerned about this set of circumstances, as this was how she herself had managed to catch the eye of the king; the *LHF* alleges that she had been a servant of Audovera, Chilperic's first wife, but had managed to supplant her mistress.¹⁶⁷ Fredegund had nowhere to go – no noble relatives whose estate she could retreat to, and she could hardly expect to fare well under Clovis' regime. She therefore acted out of desperation. She had the servant girl seized, and bound to a stake outside Clovis' lodgings in a manner perhaps designed to signal her intentions towards Clovis himself.¹⁶⁸ She then ordered Clovis murdered.

Not that her actions were entirely motivated by self-interest. Fredegund's murderous machinations also benefitted her husband. This is obvious in the case of the assassination of Sigibert while he was besieging Chilperic at Tournai in 575.¹⁶⁹ But

¹⁶⁴ *DLH* V.49.

¹⁶⁵ *DLH* V.50.

¹⁶⁶ *DLH* V.39.

¹⁶⁷ *LHF* 31, *MGH SSRM* II, 291-293.

¹⁶⁸ Danuta Shanzer says that we should understand by Gregory's account that the girl was impaled on the stake, rather than simply bound to it ("History, Romance, Love, and Sex in Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*, in *WGT* 55).

¹⁶⁹ *DLH* IV.51.

Chilperic also had reason to be wary of his sons. In marrying Brunhild, Merovech had clearly stated his intention to become a Merovingian ruler, and possibly to challenge his father, as he now, in theory at least, had a claim to both the Neustrian and Austrasian kingdoms.¹⁷⁰ The bishop who married Brunhild and Merovech was Praetextatus, bishop of Rouen. Fredegar suggests that the bishop and the queen were conspiring against Chilperic.¹⁷¹ Brunhild fares very badly in Fredegar's account, so there is good reason to be wary of this assessment, but it is likely that Chilperic was very concerned about the move that his son had made.

While Praetextatus's trial was concerned with Merovech, Gregory's trial was, as we have seen, concerned with an alleged plan to elevate Clovis to kingship. Ian Wood suggests that it is no coincidence that Clovis was killed at about this time.¹⁷² Once again, while Fredegund is credited with arranging for Clovis to be killed, his demise can only have been to Chilperic's advantage, if the young man was truly a part of plots to supplant his father. Gregory even hints at Chilperic's tacit approval, pointing out that he had ordered the young prince to be brought before the queen just as he himself was about to

¹⁷⁰ In Gregory's account, Merovech comes across as something of a tragic hero. He may have suspected that he was to be excluded from the succession, and took it upon himself to ensure his position, without his father's consent. Regardless of whether the son has a moral advantage, the very fact of his disobedience – which breaks one of the ten commandments – means that his fate is sealed: *Merovechus vero de patre atque novercam multa crimina loquebatur; quae cum ex parte vera essent, credo, acceptum non fuisse Deo, ut haec per filium vulgarentur* (DLH V.14 MGH SSRM I.1, 209.17-18). “Merovech made many charges against his father and stepmother, which were perhaps partly true, but I believe it was not acceptable to God that such things should be made public through a son.” Gregory had of course made a similar point in DLH IV.20, in which King Chlothar goes to war against his disobedient son Chramn. In this account, Chlothar is imagined as making the explicit connection between himself and King David, and prays that God might grant the same judgment to him as had been granted in the battle between David and Absalom (2 Kings 8).

¹⁷¹ *Chronicle* III.78.

¹⁷² *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 87.

absent himself by going hunting.¹⁷³ He perhaps did not wish to dirty his hands with the murder of a son who had become troublesome.

More broadly, Fredegund's actions may have helped to curb in the next generation the sort of violence which characterised the relationships between Chilperic and his brothers. Charibert, Guntram and Sigibert were all Chlothar I's sons by his second wife, Ingund, while Chilperic's mother was Ingund's sister, Aregund.¹⁷⁴ There is no record of either sister playing a part in the succession of her sons.¹⁷⁵ The fact that neither seems to have acted against her stepsons may perhaps be explained by their own close relationship.¹⁷⁶ However, the fact that Chlothar was survived by four adult sons meant that much blood was shed as these kings fought to add to their territories. The initial fighting which took place between the sons of Chlothar I after his death in 561 was motivated in part by Chilperic's dissatisfaction with his share of the patrimony. If nothing more positive can be said about Fredegund's actions against her stepsons, it is probable that they prevented many potential deaths in inter-fraternal fighting. She was never forced to choose between her sons, as Brunhild chose between her grandsons¹⁷⁷ and as Chlothild may have chosen between her sons.¹⁷⁸ Hers was a far simpler choice, and her actions were neither inexplicable nor very far removed in spirit from those of these other two queens.

¹⁷³ *DLH* V.39.

¹⁷⁴ *DLH* IV.3.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 59.

¹⁷⁶ Ingund asked Chlothar to find a suitable husband for her sister; Ingund does not seem to have been greatly perturbed by this turn of events (*DLH* IV.3).

¹⁷⁷ Childebert's sons, Theudebert (†612) and Theuderic (†613). See Fredegar, IV.27.

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter 2 72-7.

However, as we have seen, Fredegund proved to be a ready scapegoat. In the pages of the *DLH*, she was initially linked to the murder of Galswinth only by implication,¹⁷⁹ and by rumour alone to that of Merovech.¹⁸⁰ Yet shortly after the death of Chilperic, while Fredegund was still living under Guntram's protection, Childebert's envoy stated her guilt of these and the murders of Sigibert, Clovis and Chilperic as fact.¹⁸¹ Even if we accept that there were political motivations for the blackening of her character, why was her responsibility for all these deaths thought plausible?

There may have been aspects to Fredegund's character which laid her unusually open to accusation. One of the duties of a queen was to provide hospitality in the king's household to the group of warriors who surrounded him. Such warriors, especially if they had been raised at the king's household from a young age, looked to the queen as a surrogate mother.¹⁸² Fredegund may have performed this role particularly well, inspiring a loyalty that allowed her to secure the support of the Neustrian nobles for her small son after Chilperic's death.¹⁸³ She may have been particularly skilled at manipulating the networks of power and information between the members of the warband. Fortunatus

¹⁷⁹ *DLH* IV.28.

¹⁸⁰ *DLH* V.18.

¹⁸¹ *DLH* VII.7.

¹⁸² Nelson, "Medieval Queenship" 182. Michael Enright uses the poem *Beowulf* to explore the ways in which the queen used the occasion of the *convivium* to cement connections between the king and his followers, and to affirm the relative status of each member of the warband ("Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1998) 175-79. Enright also draws attention to the gnomic poem Maxims I, in which it is stated that, at mead drinking, the lady "must at all times and places approach the protector of princes first, in front of the companions, quickly pass the first cup to her lord's hand, and know what advice to give him as joint master and mistress of the house together" (Ibid. 176, referencing T.A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge, 1976) 68-9).

¹⁸³ See Stafford, "Queens and Queenship" 464 on the lasting ties that were formed within the idealized household of King Alfred the Great.

describes her as “shrewd”, and declared her intelligence an asset to the king, as well as praising her as a mistress of Chilperic’s palace.¹⁸⁴ It was expected that a queen would provide counsel to the king,¹⁸⁵ but perhaps Fredegund was particularly known for her faculty or enthusiasm in this regard.¹⁸⁶ Not only would she have counselled him, as was expected, but would have kept her ear to the ground in order to keep him informed of any currents of discontent within the warband. Her adroitness behind the scenes was a double-edged sword: it is impossible now to say whether her personal charisma allowed her to persuade assassins to carry out on her behalf all the murders attributed to her, or whether this observed quality made her the likeliest candidate when a scapegoat was sought.

Because the power of any medieval queen was frequently exercised behind closed doors, the obvious way for her detractors to criticise her activities was to highlight the negative possibilities offered by such a *modus operandi*. Assassinations, unexplained poisonings, and suspected witchcraft could all be pinned on the queen.¹⁸⁷ The queen’s

¹⁸⁴ Fortunatus, *Carmen* 9.1.119, *MGH AA* IV.1 204, and trans. in George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* 79.

¹⁸⁵ Nelson, “Medieval Queenship” 193.

¹⁸⁶ Or perhaps this remark constituted a veiled warning? Judith George has highlighted the ways in which Fortunatus, following the traditions of Latin court poetry, may have used performances to influence royalty. (*Venantius Fortunatus: A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992) 35-40. In the case of the trial at Berny-Rivière, it is suggested that he used his *Carmina* 9.1 to praise the king’s justice and mercy in order to highlight the way in which he *ought* to act. (Ibid, 48-61). In describing the queen as shrewd, might Fortunatus be suggesting that it may be detrimental to Chilperic’s reputation, as king and as man, to become known for listening so closely to his wife’s advice that he might neglect his own judgment? On the other hand, panegyric may also have been intended to tailor the behaviour of the queen: Fortunatus praises the queen’s honour, “in a context where her honour was at stake and she, like her husband, might be tempted to act less than honourably.” (Ibid. 53). The comment that Fredegund was shrewd might have been intended to prompt the queen to give wise advice, rather than to demand a course of action that would satisfy her own desire for vengeance. The context of this particular poem is therefore vital (see also Smith, “Carrying the cares of state” 237-8).

¹⁸⁷ C.f. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers* 14-5.

role as mistress of the house might also fall under suspicion; a role inextricably linked with her role as the king's bedfellow. Fredegund appears to have had a certain personal charm, not necessarily merely physical, which incited not only her husband's passion but made Guntram desirous of her company at table while she was under his protection.¹⁸⁸ For a time, as we have seen, he was resistant to calls for her to be punished for her many alleged crimes. This charm was surely also employed in Chilperic's household. Fortunatus compliments her generosity, a reference, perhaps, to gifts given to members of the warband.¹⁸⁹ Such charms may, however, have laid her open to accusations about her sexual behaviour, particularly from those who found that they were not among those highly favoured.¹⁹⁰ In addition to the slanderous rumours quashed by the trial at Berny-Rivière, the *LHF* claims that Chilperic was murdered on Fredegund's orders when he discovered that she was having an affair.¹⁹¹ It seems that Fredegund's unusually skilful handling of her role might in itself have been fodder for her enemies.

¹⁸⁸ *DLH* VII.7.

¹⁸⁹ *Carmina* 9.1.120, *MGH AA* IV.1 204, and trans. in George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* 79.

¹⁹⁰ Gregory's description of Leudast hints that one of the reasons for Gregory's detestation of the count was because he had managed to worm his way into the affections of a queen, who had promoted him to a position he did not deserve. (*..ad Marcoveifam reginam, quam Chariberthus rex nimium diligens in loco sororis toro adsciverat, fugit. Quae libenter eum colligens, provocat equorumque meliorum deputat esse custodem. Hinc iam obsessus vanitate ac superbiae deditus, comitatum ambit stabulorum; quo accepto, cunctos despicit ac postponit, inflator vanitate, luxuria dissolvitur, cupiditate succenditur et in causis patronae alumnus proprius huc illucque defertur. Cuius post obitum refertus praedis, locum ipsum cum rege Charibertho, oblati muneribus, tenere coepit* (*DLH* V.48, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 257.25-7 – 258.1-5). "He fled to Queen Marcovefa, whom King Charibert loved to excess, and whom he had taken to bed in her sister's place. She received him willingly, promoted him and made him keeper of her best horses. Soon after his pride and vanity caused him to devote himself to becoming count of the stables. Having received this, he looked down on everyone, puffed up with vanity, and he declined into lechery. He was consumed with desire, and as his patroness' favourite he was sent to and fro on her affairs. After her death, his purse was loaded with spoils, and he offered gifts to Charibert, and so retained his office." Perhaps Gregory was concerned that Leudast could also charm Fredegund, with dire consequences for Gregory himself.

¹⁹¹ Ch. 35, *MGH SSRM* II, 302-3. Attributing suspicious deaths to crimes of the queen's passion was convenient, if one wished to sully her reputation: guilt or innocence would be very difficult to establish, and the whiff of scandal would be almost impossible to eradicate.

Conclusion

This chapter subjected the character of Fredegund as presented in the *DLH* to a scrutiny which suggested ample reason to doubt Gregory's word. Her image is shrouded in gendered stereotype, and owes much to political expedient. In the early years of Gregory's tenure as Bishop of Tours, he sought to define himself as a worthy successor of St. Martin, by challenging royal authority. He moulded the characters of Chilperic and Fredegund in order to achieve this aim. After Chilperic's death, Fredegund's position was insecure. She may have moved aggressively in order to secure a future for herself and her son, but Gregory's account of her activities in these years presents a picture of a uniformly wicked and immoral woman. This chapter has argued that Gregory blackened Fredegund's name in order to help his Austrasian patrons achieve an alliance with King Guntram. He is shown here as an able politician and bishop: any residual suspicion of naïveté is banished, and he and his writing are shown to be deeply immersed in Merovingian politics.

The final part of the chapter suggested that Fredegund was a highly competent queen. Any queen who wished to retain her husband's favour and to exercise a degree of power had to be resourceful, and this resourcefulness could easily be recast as deplorable opportunism. The consistency with which Fredegund maintained her place by her husband's side as well as, perhaps, her ability to charm other powerful men, excited suspicion. A consort's proximity to the king always gave rise to such jealousies and misgivings. It is no coincidence, surely, that the queen who enjoys highest praise in the *DLH* is the one who made the poorest show of her duties as consort: Radegund.

Chapter 5

Rebels and Rhetoric: the revolt at Ste. Croix

This thesis has argued strongly for the *Histories* as a propaganda piece, intended to bolster the reputation and standing of the patron saint and third bishop of Tours, St. Martin, and by extension the successors to his see including, naturally, Gregory himself. The present chapter continues in this vein, but also notes a change of focus over the course of Books IX and X, the last two Books of the work. This change will be highlighted by an in-depth study of a remarkable series of events taking place at the monastery of Ste. Croix, Poitiers, in 589-90. Here, a group of dissatisfied nuns revolted against their abbess and broke out of their institution, violently resisting all attempts by the local clergy to bring them to order.

The revolt occupies a unique place in studies of sixth century Gaul: while it was excised in its entirety from the ‘political’ edit of the *Histories* offered by Alexander Murray,¹ Georg Scheibelreiter saw it as highly illustrative of the political tensions surrounding both rival kingdoms and rival bishoprics.² Scholars interested in the female monastic experience have mined it for details on the particular difficulties communal life presented to women,³ as well as the challenges of maintaining discipline at this early

¹ Murray, *Gregory of Tours: The Merovingians*.

² G. Scheibelreiter, “Königstöchter im Kloster: Radegund († 587) und der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers (589)” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* vol. 87 (1979) 1-37.

³ For example, see J.A. McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA, 1996) 110-111.

stage in monastic history, when such details were still being thrashed out.⁴ Nira Pancer used it in support of her thesis on Merovingian female honour,⁵ but it has rarely been studied in its literary context; the notable exception being Martin Heinzelmann, who argues in his *Gregory of Tours* that the revolt has an apocalyptic flavour,⁶ with the panel of bishops who eventually bring the nuns to trial prefiguring the Community of Saints on the Day of Judgment.⁷ The revolt has thus far received no comprehensive treatment in the light of Gregory's own political career,⁸ nor has its literary place in the *Histories* been studied in sufficient depth.

This chapter will present the events at Poitiers as highly revealing of both. It will be shown that, thanks to the special relationship that the bishops of Tours enjoyed with the monastery of Ste. Croix, Gregory was able to use the incident, shocking and disturbing as it doubtless was, to bolster his own authority. However, a subtle shift of emphasis is detectable between the last two Books of the *Histories*, from a perspective concerned primarily with the power and influence of Tours and its patron Saint, St. Martin, to the wider Church.

⁴ See for example L. Eckenstein, *Women Under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life Between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500* (Cambridge, 1896 and repub. Cambridge, 2006) 65-72. Page references are to the 2006 edition.

⁵ Pancer, *Sans Peur et Sans Vergogne* 238-41.

⁶ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 74.

⁷ *Ibid.* 77.

⁸ Luce Pietri notes that the see of Tours enjoyed enhanced status as a result of Gregory's conduct during the events of the revolt, though she states that this was not in fact Gregory's own intention (*La ville de Tours* 333). See also Smith, "Radegundis peccatrix" 322-3 for the way in which Gregory's changing image of Radegund herself helped to underwrite his own authority.

The revolt occupies a vital literary place in the *Histories* and, as will be demonstrated here for the first time, the gender of the nuns was of the greatest importance. Nuns had the capacity, in their bodily purity, to represent both individually and collectively the Bride of Christ - a symbolic representation of the Church cleansed of all sin⁹ - who would be reunited with Christ, the Bridegroom, at the Second Coming.¹⁰ Gregory's account of the revolt was heavily coloured by Biblical influences, and must therefore be read with an understanding of the importance of the Bible to his thinking. The Song of Songs and the Book of Revelation were at this time increasingly being read in conjunction, as two different descriptions of Christ's covenant with His Bride, the eschatological Church.¹¹ This chapter will examine Gregory's use of these Books, and show that, just as he used female figures to explore ideas about orthodoxy and heresy, so in the final two books of the *DLH* women are part of his literary strategy as he expresses ideas about the purity of the church and the approaching Apocalypse.

The behaviour required of nuns will be examined in light of the Book of Revelation, with its anxieties over food and sexual behaviour. The particular demands placed on female religious will be studied in this context, in order to examine what the nuns represented for Gregory and his colleagues. In Revelation, St John of Patmos creates a dichotomy between good and wicked female figures.¹² Gregory appears to do the same with the figures of Ste. Croix's saintly foundress, Radegund, († 587) and the

⁹ Ephesians 5.25-27.

¹⁰ Revelation 19.7-9.

¹¹ E. A. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1992) 89.

¹² See P.B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford, 2001) 83-96.

wicked nun Clothild who instigated the revolt. However, it will become clear that Clothild was in some respects following Radegund's example, which raises again, as with the comparison between the elder Clothild and Fredegund in the previous chapter, questions about the behaviour expected of Merovingian royal women.

Sources

The narrative of the revolt can be found in *DLH* IX.39 to 43, and X.14 to 17 and 20. Included in Gregory's account is earlier correspondence between Radegund and the bishops of her time, which is produced from the archives at Tours and at Ste. Croix in an attempt to recall the nuns to proper behaviour. Also included is the Text of the Judgement, a record of the proceedings of the nuns' trial. A letter and poem from Venantius Fortunatus to Gregory soliciting his help also survive.¹³ Although the revolt predates both of the *Vitae* of Radegund, it is not directly mentioned in either. Baudonivia's work in particular seems to have been written to counter the damaging effects of the revolt on the nunnery's reputation.¹⁴

The revolt

In late February 589, a group of 40 or so nuns of the Ste. Croix monastery in Poitiers rose up against their abbess, Leubovera, and broke out of the institution. They were led by Clothild, a daughter of King Charibert, who had apparently taken umbrage

¹³ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* VIII.12 & 12^a, F. Leo ed., *MGH AA* IV.1, 196-7.

¹⁴ These can be found in Krusch ed., *MGH SSRM* II, 358-405, and trans. in McNamara, Halborg and Whatley eds., *Sainted Women* 70-105.

over the fact that a social inferior had been appointed abbess instead of herself. Her intention was to visit her royal relatives in order to plead her case with them.¹⁵

The nuns came first to Tours, with whose bishops the monastery had a close relationship. They nuns reached the city on the first day of March, and presented their complaints to Gregory. They also denounced their own bishop, Maroveus.¹⁶ Gregory attempted to reason with them, providing evidence that their behaviour contradicted the intentions of their foundress, Radegund, who had died around eighteen months previously.¹⁷ In particular, he pointed out that the nuns, in abandoning their convent, risked excommunication.¹⁸

Clothild remained resolute, but agreed to wait for better weather before continuing on her journey to visit her Uncle, King Guntram, who was then at Chalon-sur-Saône. Clothild set off, leaving the remaining nuns under the authority of her cousin Basina, daughter of King Chilperic. Gregory did his best to assist them, but could not stop a good many of the nuns accepting proposals from suitors, and some of the women became pregnant.

Clothild returned to Tours, having been well-received by her uncle, and having received a promise that bishops would be sent to look into the matter. When these failed

¹⁵ *DLH* IX.39.

¹⁶ *DLH* IX.40.

¹⁷ *DLH* IX.2. He presented a letter from the bishops who had met at the Council of Tours in 567, which congratulated Radegund on the success of her foundation.

¹⁸ The letter also laid out penalties for nuns who did not adhere to their vows.

to materialise, Clothild and the remaining unmarried nuns returned to Poitiers. Here they gathered around themselves a motley crew of *furibus, homicidis, adulteris omniumque criminum reis*¹⁹ and sought sanctuary in the Church of St. Hilary. They violently resisted an attempt by the metropolitan bishop of the province, Gundegisel of Bordeaux, and several of his suffragans, to restore them to order. In response to this outrage, Gundegisel excommunicated the nuns. Clothild manoeuvred to take over the monastery, appropriating its estates and coercing its employees to work for her instead. She also threatened the life of the abbess.²⁰

King Childebert sent the priest Theutar to hear the case, but the nuns refused to attend a hearing.²¹ The nuns disbanded over the winter months, but in the spring of the following year, Clothild renewed her efforts to gain control of the monastery. With her gang of thugs, she broke into the monastery, seized the abbess and locked her up, in a house close to St. Hilary's. They then went back to the monastery and looted it. These events occurred just seven days before Easter, in the year 590. The bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, threatened not to celebrate the Easter ceremony, unless the abbess was released.²² Clothild rejected this, but the abbess was rescued. Meanwhile, the violence continued at the very tomb of Radegund, and *vel quis umquam tantas plagas tantasque*

¹⁹ *DLH IX 40, MGH SSRM I.1, 466.8-9*. "thieves, murderers, adulterers and men guilty of all crimes".

²⁰ *DLH IX.41*.

²¹ *DLH IX.43*.

²² *DLH X.15*.

*strages vel tanta mala verbis poterit explicare, ubi vix praeteriit dies sine homicidio, hora sine iurgio vel momentum aliquod sine fletu?*²³

Kings Childebert and Guntram decided to appoint a council of bishops to investigate the matter. However, before Gregory would attend, he demanded that the revolt be suppressed. Thus the Count of Poitiers, Macco, received orders from Childebert to put down the rebels, which he did with brutal efficiency, in spite of Clothild's protests that her royal status was to be respected.²⁴

When the nuns were brought to trial, they brought a number of accusations against their abbess, all of which were dismissed by the assembled bishops.²⁵ The bishops then turned to the more serious matter of dealing with Clothild and Basina, the ringleaders of the nuns. Canon law could only punish church matters – these being disobedience towards the abbess and bishops, and leaving the nunnery – for which the sentence of excommunication was upheld.²⁶

Some time later, Childebert requested that Chlothild and Basina be readmitted to communion. Basina humbled herself before her abbess, and was allowed to return to the

²³ *DLH X.15, MGH SSRM I.1, 503.4-6.* “who ever had words sufficient to describe such great violence, so many slaughters, so much evil, when scarcely a day passed without a murder, an hour without a quarrel or a moment without tears?”

²⁴ *‘Nolite super me, quaeso, vim inferre, quae sum regina, filia regis regisque alterius consubrina; nolite facere, ne quando veniat tempus, ut ulciscar ex vobis’ (MGH SSRM I.1, 503.21-22 - 504.1).* “Do me no violence, I beg you, for I am a queen, daughter of one king, cousin of another; do not do it, lest the time come when I may take my revenge on you.”

²⁵ *DLH X.15.*

²⁶ The Text of the Judgement is preserved in *DLH X.16.*

monastery, although relations between abbess and former rebel continued to be somewhat stormy. Clothild refused to return to the monastery, and was instead given her own estate to live on.²⁷

Ste. Croix and the Bishops of Tours.

The main events of Radegund's life are well-documented,²⁸ though some of the dates are less than clear. What is remarkable about her career is the care with which she fostered ties with a variety of clergymen. Venantius Fortunatus, the first of her two biographers, tells us that while still living as Chlothar's queen, she took care to serve visiting clerics personally. If the holy guest happened to be a bishop, she was particularly joyful, and served him with all humility.²⁹ Radegund managed to secure the help of several such bishops in the years following her desertion of Chlothar: the crowning achievement was managing, in 558, to secure the support of Germanus of Paris in obtaining her husband's active support for the creation of her monastery at Poitiers. Baudonivia, Radegund's second biographer, tells us that Radegund had received word that her husband wished to reclaim her as his wife. Horrified, she sent a letter to the bishop, who was then with Chlothar at Tours, begging him to intervene.

²⁷ *DLH* X.20.

²⁸ See Smith, "Radegundis peccatrix:" 303-326; Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 30-35; McNamara, Halborg and Whatley (eds.) *Sainted Women* 60-65.

²⁹ Venantius Fortunatus, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber I* (henceforth *VR I*) ch. 4 (B. Krusch ed. and trans, *MGH SSRM* II (Hanover, 1888) 367.28-29).

*At ubi eas relegit vir Deo plenus, lacrimans posternit se pedibus regis
ante sepulchrum beati Martini cum contestatione divina, sicut ei in litteris
fuerat intimatum, ad Pictavis civitatem non accederet.*³⁰

Radegund had sought out St. Martin's tomb before,³¹ and had enriched his shrine, but this event perhaps marked the beginning of a specific connection between the saint and Radegund's endeavors at Poitiers. Poitiers and Tours had in fact endured a complex relationship through the figure of St. Martin since shortly after the saint's death in 397, when the residents of the towns disagreed over who had the rights to his bodily remains.³² Poitiers lost out, and in Gregory's account of the revolt of 589-90, the Poitiers bishops and their patron Saint, Hilary, appear to have continued to play second fiddle to the spiritual draw of St. Martin.

When Radegund first founded her monastery, relations between the nuns and the bishop of Poitiers had been amenable:³³ the bishop at the time, Pientius, had been supportive. Chlothar had groomed one Duke Austrapius to be his successor, but on Chlothar's death in 561, the new ruler of Poitiers, Charibert, had other ideas.³⁴ His

³⁰ Baudonivia, *De Vita Sanctae Radegundis Liber II* (VR II) ch. 7 (MGH *SSRM* II, 382.12-14). "And when the God-filled man read what was confided to him in her letter, he prostrated himself weeping at the king's feet before the tomb of Saint Martin and solemnly entreated him in God's name not to go to the city of Poitiers" (trans. from McNamara, Halborg and Whatley eds., *Sainted Women* 90).

³¹ VR I ch. 14, 369.

³² DLH I.48.

³³ *Tempore Chlothari regis, cum beata Radegundis hoc monasterium instituisset, semper subiecta et oboediens cum omni congregatione sua anterioribus fuit episcopis* (MGH *SSRM* I.1, 464.3-5).

³⁴ DLH IV.18.

appointee, Pascentius, held the see at some point between the years 561 and 567.³⁵ Georg Scheibelreiter suggests that he continued to be supportive of the nuns;³⁶ Van Dam disagrees.³⁷ The real difficulties appear to have begun, however, with the accession of Maroveus.³⁸

In 567, bishops meeting at the Council of Tours sent a letter to Radegund commending her on her achievement in setting up her monastery, which now enjoyed high fame and deservedly received much praise. In the letter the bishops, led by Eufronius of Tours (†573) who presided over the conference,³⁹ liken Radegund to St. Martin. This letter may be a response to one from Radegund herself, in which she sets out her original intentions for her monastery, alludes to difficulties she is experiencing with her own bishop – probably Maroveus – and commends the protection of her community first to the wider community of bishops, and then to the kings.⁴⁰ If it is true that the bishops' letter was a reply, then its reference to St. Martin, in connecting the queen to the saint, is surely reassurance of the ongoing relationship between the bishops of Tours and Ste. Croix. Even if the letters stand independently, the letter still reinforces

³⁵ That is, at some point between the death of Chlothar in 561 and Charibert's in 567, as we are told that Maroveus had become Bishop by the time that Sigibert became king of Poitiers (*DLH IX.40, MGH SSRM I.1, 464.5-6*).

³⁶ Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 11.

³⁷ Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 30. Pascentius had close ties with the Basilica of St. Hilary, whose cult was perhaps increasingly challenged by the presence of the saintly queen. However, he had been an abbot, rather than a cleric, before his appointment to the see, (Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 11) so he was perhaps broadly sympathetic towards Radegund and her monastery.

³⁸ This was probably by 567, as Gregory tells us that [*t]empore vero Sygiberthi, postquam Maroveus episcopatum urbis adeptus est (MGH SSRM I.1 464.5-6)*. "In the time of Sigibert, however, when Maroveus had obtained the office of bishop of the city".

³⁹ O. Pontal, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens* (Paris, 1989) 157. The other bishops were: Praetextatus of Rouen, Germanus of Paris, Felix of Nantes, Domitianus of Angers, Victorius of Rennes and Domnolus of Le Mans.

⁴⁰ *DLH IX.41*.

a connection. However, Radegund's letter is itself revealing of the limitations of episcopal power – it acknowledges that the authority of the bishops may not be sufficient, and may need royal backup. This is a theme that would be further highlighted by the events of the revolt in 589.

Charibert died in 567,⁴¹ shortly after the Council of Tours. Sigibert took control of Poitiers. The next year, Radegund wrote to Sigibert to ask his permission to request a relic of the True Cross from the Emperor Justin II at Constantinople. This was to be the crown jewel of her considerable relic collection. In 569, the relic arrived in Gaul. Radegund asked Maroveus to install the relic, but he refused. Radegund wrote once again to her stepson, to ask him to find a replacement. Scheibelreiter suggests that Radegund may have favoured Sigibert as he was more mindful of church matters, and less inclined to sexual profligacy than his brothers. An explanation may perhaps be sought, however, in Radegund's relative evaluation of royal and episcopal power. Poitiers lay under the metropolitan jurisdiction of Bordeaux, which lay within the kingdom of Guntram. An alternative course of action might therefore have been for Radegund to request a replacement bishop from within the province, from the Bishop of Bordeaux or from Guntram. However, Radegund appears to have appealed to regnal rather than provincial unity, and made the request to "her" king, the king who ruled Poitiers, who was Sigibert. And of course, her monastery already enjoyed a connection with the bishops of Poitiers, and with St. Martin. Sigibert sent Eufronius to perform the task.⁴²

⁴¹ *DLH* IV.26.

⁴² *DLH* IX.40.

Radegund tried on various occasions to seek Maroveus's help, but was rebuffed. Doubtless her network of episcopal connections was threatening to him, and the presence of the True Cross relic rather overshadowed the cult of St. Hilary,⁴³ from the promotion of which Maroveus, as Bishop of Poitiers, derived much of his authority.⁴⁴ We know from the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus that Radegund became a patron of the deacon Gregory, who would become Eufronius's successor as bishop of Tours.⁴⁵ During his episcopate, Gregory visited her several times.⁴⁶ Thus the special relationship between the bishops of Tours and the monastery that was now Ste. Croix continued into Gregory's own episcopate.

Like Tours, the city of Poitiers was frequently fought over through the latter half of the sixth century, and as at Tours, tensions between the Merovingian kings were disposed to spill over here because the city was often on the borders between kingdoms.⁴⁷ After the death of Sigibert in 575,⁴⁸ the territory of Poitiers was disputed, being inherited by Sigibert's son Childebert, but also claimed by the dead king's brother,

⁴³ Although, as Barbara Rosenwein highlights, as the relic was hidden away within the monastery, most ordinary people would have been unable to visit and seek its help (B. Rosenwein, "Inaccessible Cloisters: Gregory of Tours and episcopal exemption" in *WGT* 193). Perhaps Maroveus did not regard the installation of the relic as his duty because it would not benefit his flock. Besides seeing frequent warfare, McNamara highlights archaeological evidence from this period in Poitiers which suggests that there was famine in the area. The *Text of the Judgement* (*DLH* X.16) records Leubovera's defence to a charge that the nuns were underfed, stating that times were scarce, and the nuns were fed as well as they could be in the circumstances (*MGH SSRM* I.1 505.20-21 - 506.1). The people of Poitiers had good reason to desire holy protection. The presence of a wealthy monastery, which now housed such a potent but unreachable relic, would have aroused local resentment. Maroveus's feelings were probably not unique. Elsewhere in Gregory's writings, he invited praise as conscientious and *non inmerito Helari beatissimi discipulus praeconandus* (*VM* 2.44, *MGH SSRM* I.2, 175.9).

⁴⁴ As Gregory acknowledges by referring to Maroveus as Hilary's disciple.

⁴⁵ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmen* 5.3.14-16 *MGH AA* IV.1 106.

⁴⁶ One such instance is mentioned in *GM* 5.

⁴⁷ Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles*, 37.

⁴⁸ *DLH* IV.51

Chilperic.⁴⁹ This is not the place to recount the many raids suffered by the town and its surroundings: let it suffice to say that the violence intensified with the death of Chilperic in 584.⁵⁰ In 585, Guntram sent envoys to the town to find out if the inhabitants would receive his rulership, but Maroveus rejected these advances. Subsequently, Guntram's troops ravaged the area around Poitiers until its inhabitants were forced to submit.⁵¹

Radegund died on 13th August 587.⁵² Once again, Maroveus was not present, and Gregory took his place in presiding over the funeral ceremonies.⁵³ Three months later, on 27th November, Guntram and Childebert signed a treaty, which officially returned to Childebert's jurisdiction all those cities which his father had held, including Tours and Poitiers.⁵⁴ Shortly after Radegund's death, the abbess Agnes had again asked Maroveus to take a benevolent interest in the monastery, and in response to this, but also in response to the more settled political circumstances, Maroveus now went to Childebert to ask for written consent to take the monastery under his jurisdiction, as would normally be the case with all monasteries in his diocese.⁵⁵ Agnes apparently died not long after, and Maroveus most likely had a hand in the appointment of the new abbess, Leubovera. This Leubovera was probably of noble stock,⁵⁶ but was not royal; nor did she carry the lustre

⁴⁹ *DLH* V.2, 24. The Pretender Gundovald also wished to collect oaths on behalf of Childebert there, seeing the town as rightfully belonging to this king (*DLH* VII.26).

⁵⁰ *DLH* VI.46.

⁵¹ *DLH* VII.24.

⁵² *DLH* IX.2.

⁵³ *GC* 104.

⁵⁴ *DLH* IX.20.

⁵⁵ *DLH* IX.40

⁵⁶ Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 36. In the *Text of the Judgment*, (X.16) a nun named Dimidia, who is described as being of noble family, is asked to speak in defence of her abbess (*MGH SSRM* I.1

of having been appointed by the queen-foundress, as had Agnes. This appears to have caused some resentment. Maroveus visited the nuns in late February 589, and he attempted to pour some oil on the troubled waters. Negotiations failed, and Maroveus was not only disdained but “trampled underfoot.”⁵⁷

Venantius Fortunatus, who was then resident in Poitiers and who had enjoyed close ties with Radegund and Agnes, wrote a letter and poem to Gregory imploring his help with the matter. The letter, like that of the bishops, also invokes the example of St. Martin.⁵⁸ Gregory received it before the nuns came to Tours, and was ready with his response when they arrived, hoping, like Fortunatus, to appeal to the old ties between their institution and the successors of St. Martin. The letter that Gregory produces as a warning is of course the one likening Radegund herself to St. Martin. Over the next few pages, Gregory relates a brief history of the faltering relationship between the nuns and Maroveus. It is also here that we learn of Eufronius’ readiness to step in to officiate at the installation of Radegund’s True Cross fragment. In admonishing the nuns, and in attempting to care for them, Gregory is caring for their spiritual and physical welfare in a way that their own bishop had singularly failed to do.⁵⁹ Julia Smith has argued that

506.16-21). This Didimia later became abbess, and instructed Baudonivia to write the second of Radegund’s two *Vitae*. (Baudonivia, *VR II* Prologue, *MGH SSRM II*, 377.5-7). It would appear that it was usual to choose the abbess from among such women. A clue as to Leuovera’s possible deficiencies, albeit a rather tenuous one, is given by the *Text of the Judgment*, (X.16) in which we are told that the bishops offered her some paternal guidance on the necessity of maintaining discipline in the monastery (*MGH SSRM I.1* 507.10-11). Leuovera appears to have lost the respect of the nuns. Did she lack the commanding air which appears to have come naturally to Radegund, and by association, to Agnes?

⁵⁷ *conculcato* (DLH X.16, *MGH SSRM I.1* 507.14).

⁵⁸ *Carmina* 8.12 and 8.12a, trans. Marc Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes II*, bks. V-VIII (Paris 1998) 154-5.

⁵⁹ At some point, Leuovera began to circulate copies of Radegund’s letter to bishops in the surrounding areas, as a reminder to them of their obligations to the nunnery. The letter contained powerful enjoinders to

Radegund lent authority to Gregory's own episcopacy;⁶⁰ the revolt now allowed Gregory to push this further by reinforcing the connection between his see, its patron saint and Radegund's monastery, wherein was housed the only relic of the True Cross in Gaul. Thus Tours could lay claim to a central place in the story of salvation: the reputation of St. Martin as the "belated 'apostle' of Gaul"⁶¹ would be assured.

Apocalypticism in Books IX and X

The nuns' revolt plays a central role in an apocalyptic mood which escalates over the course of the *Histories'* last two books. In Book IX, the focus is still very much with Tours: the revolt, although situated in Poitiers had, as we have seen, implications for Gregory's own authority and influence. Book X is slightly different, its attention turning somewhat to the wider Church. While apocalyptic elements are present in Book IX, the most significant are centred around the prestige of Tours, and challenges to Gregory's own authority. The most sustained attention given to any such element is to one Desiderius, who presented Gregory with a serious challenge in 587.⁶² Desiderius gained a foothold in Tours in Gregory's absence, and Gregory's apocalyptic writing in and around the description of his appearance was part of a propaganda offensive against him. IX.6, which deals with Desiderius, is sandwiched between a chapter which recounts an unusual

the bishops of her time and all their successors to watch over the monastery, and to see to the punishment of any nun who broke the Rule. Leobovera also read the letter aloud to the nuns in the monastery. The version that she used was not, however, the version that Gregory himself had preserved from the time of Eufronius, one of the original recipients. Yvonne Labande-Mailfert suggests that the new version was altered to fit the occasion, as it omitted the section about preventing anyone from claiming any jurisdiction over the monastery that had not been permitted in Radegund's own time. Maroveus had of course done exactly that (*Histoire de l'abbaye Sainte-Croix de Poitiers* (Paris, 1987) 66.

⁶⁰ Smith "Radegundis peccatrix" 323.

⁶¹ I. Moreira, "Provisatrix optima: St. Radegund of Poitiers' relic petitions to the East", *JMH* 19 (1993) 289.

⁶² *DLH* IX.6.

number of prodigies, and a description of the activity of another ne'er-do-well, who also made a nuisance of himself at Tours before leaving for Paris. This man was found by Bishop Ragnemod of Paris to be in possession of instruments associated with the practice of witchcraft (*maleficia*) and was eventually recognised as a runaway servant. He was a miserable, stinking drunk who at no point presented a serious threat to the episcopal authority of either Gregory or Ragnemod.

Desiderius was somewhat different, believing that he was receiving messages from the apostles Peter and Paul, and attempting to heal the sick, often with quite disastrous results. We are told that *rusticitas populi multa confluxerat, deferentes secum caecos et debiles*.⁶³ The latter half of this line is a quote from the Gospel of Matthew, which describes the healing miracles of Christ.⁶⁴ But this man is merely a parody of Christ, just as the Gospels promised that *consurgere in novissimis temporibus pseudochristos et pseudopphetas, qui, dantes signa et prodigia, etiam electos in errore inducant*.⁶⁵ By placing Desiderius in close proximity with the drunkard who had been identified as a runaway servant, Gregory reduces Desiderius to the status of the other. This contains the threat, and makes the case that they were part of the same phenomenon:

⁶³ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 417.4. “...many ignorant people came together, bringing with them the blind and weak.”

⁶⁴ Matthew 15.30. C.f. Jussen, “Liturgy and Legitimation, or How the Gallo-Romans Ended the Roman Empire”, in B. Jussen ed. and P. Selwyn trans. *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations* (Philadelphia, 2001) 148.

⁶⁵ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 420.4-6. “in the last days will arise pseudochrists and false prophets, who will lead even the elect into error” (c.f. Matthew 24.24).

these imposters, along with the prodigies of *DLH* IX.5,⁶⁶ are to be understood as no more and no less than harbingers of Armageddon.⁶⁷

Desiderius, despite his public image of austerity, was in private a glutton.⁶⁸ False bishops are frequently identified in the *Histories* by their gluttonous food habits, as well as by licentiousness, or indeed by attachment to any earthly or material pleasures.⁶⁹ While it clearly demonstrates their preference for worldly delights at the expense of a proper concern for the divine, it is also their lack of concern for the Christian

⁶⁶ One of these is the phenomenon of misshapen grapes. Claude Chavasse finds multiple biblical references to the vine as a metaphor for Israel, and hence for the church (Psalms 80.8-14; Isaiah 5.1-7; Jeremiah 2.21; Hosea 10.1; Matthew 21.33-41). By extension, when vines are unhealthy or the crop corrupted, this may indicate a problem within the church, such as a strain of heresy or a false Christ (C. Chavasse, *The Bride of Christ: an enquiry into the nuptial element in early Christianity* (London, 1939) 70).

⁶⁷ Cf. B. Jussen, "Liturgy and Legitimation" 147-8.

⁶⁸ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 417.18-20.

⁶⁹ Book I contains several illustrations of the incompatibility of sexual desire and love of God. Also VI.36 and Dagulf in VIII.19. Examples of gluttonous bishops whose habit signalled their unsuitability for office can be found in II.23, V.20, VI.36, and IX.6. Drunkenness features in IV.11, V.20, V.40, and VII.34. In VIII.20, Ursicinus, bishop of Cahors, is excommunicated, and handed a penance of abstention from meat and wine for a set period. By this action he could restore himself to a state of purity worthy of his position. The perennial ne'er-do-wells Salonus and Sagittarius seem to personify all the attachments to worldly pursuits, rejection of which should have demonstrated their vocation. Not only do they indulge in feasting and drinking, but also warfare and adultery. Covetousness in professed religious is also heavily criticised (IV.31, IV.35, V.5, VII.31, VIII. 19, VIII.39). It is not within the scope of the current thesis to analyse Gregory's criticisms of the lifestyles of his fellow bishops, but suffice to say that his political enemies within the church often turned out to be men of dubious personal habits. Felix of Nantes was "a man whose greed and arrogance knew no bounds" (V.5), while Bertram of Bordeaux caused another man to be tonsured against his will in order to get his hands on his possessions. Like Gregory, Caesarius of Arles highlighted the incompatibility of a religious vocation and an attachment to worldly goods. He cites as a warning the example of Ananias and Sapphira, "who, though they said they had offered all to the Apostles, gave part and perfidiously kept a part for themselves, which is neither becoming, permissible, nor proper" (Caesarius, *The Rule for Nuns* 6, trans. M. C. McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: a translation with a critical introduction* (Washington, 1960) 173. Radegund gives the same example in the Letter to the Bishops, clearly drawing on Caesarius's Rule, which she had obtained by this time as we learn in the letter: '*Cuique, formam apostolicam observantes, tam ego quam sorores de substantia terrena quae possedere videbamur, factis cartis, tradedimus, metu Annaniae et Saffirae in monastirio positae nihil proprium reservantes*' (*DLH* IX.42, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 471.1-4.) (*Histories* IX.42). "'Observing the apostolic example, I and my sisters, when we entered the monastery, each gave over by deed the substance of the earthly things which we had possessed, reserving nothing, fearful as we were of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira.'"

community's integrity that proves galling to their critics.⁷⁰ A religious man should demonstrate control of his appetites,⁷¹ and so set himself apart.

Martin Heinzelman has carefully traced the apocalyptic overtones of the final book of the *Histories*. There were natural phenomena, for example, earthquakes and eclipses,⁷² and the coming of an Antichrist.⁷³ At the beginning of chapter 25, Gregory states quite explicitly that these are “the beginnings of sorrows” as promised in the Gospels.⁷⁴ In describing the rogations organised by Pope Gregory the Great in response to the Roman plague of 589, Gregory quotes the prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied the End of Days, as he tells us that one of the plague's first victims was the previous Pope.⁷⁵ Adriaan Breukelaar dismissed the first chapter of Book X as a late addition, stating that Gregory showed no interest in the Roman Church elsewhere in the *Histories*.⁷⁶ In fact, this chapter is in keeping with the subtle shift of focus between the last two Books, with Gregory widening his rather parochial outlook to consider the *Ecclesia Dei* as a whole, and its need to be prepared for the Day of Judgment. The Pope exemplifies the virtues that Gregory has consistently presented as desirable in a Christian leader, but perhaps

⁷⁰ This was a topic that concerned the Church councils. At the Council of Macon in 581, canon 5 decreed that “[n]o cleric may wear secular garments, shoes, or weapons. If he does so, he shall be imprisoned for thirty days, and kept on bread and water.” *Concilia Galliae*, CCSL vol. cxlviii A, (Turnhout: Typographie Brepols editores pontificii, 1963) 224, and trans. C. J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents* vol. 4, A.D. 451-680, trans. W. R. Clark (Edinburgh, 1885) 403.

⁷¹ See Gregory's hesitation over the bowl of soup offered by King Chilperic in V.18 (see above, chapter four, 144). Here Gregory shows his lack of concern for the things of the world, as his nourishment comes rather from God. He is invulnerable to bribery.

⁷² *DLH* X.23.

⁷³ *DLH* X.25.

⁷⁴ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 517.17-18.

⁷⁵ “Begin at my sanctuary”, from Ezek. 9.6.

⁷⁶ Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Power* 67-8.

more importantly, the Pope's reaction to the plague in Rome was a model response to a possible apocalyptic portent. Rather than simply creating a mood, as might be said of Book IX, the *Histories'* final Book shows a more organised approach, addressing specific problems and doubts, such as those posed by a priest who, having been "poisoned by the wickedness of the Sadducees", doubted the resurrection to come.⁷⁷ The priest's concerns led to a prolonged argument, during which Gregory brought together "a little handbook of almost all the Biblical references on the Resurrection and the Last Judgment."⁷⁸ Like his Papal colleague, Gregory begins here in the *Histories'* final Book to consider how the Church, and individual church leaders, might face the challenges ahead. In X.15, as Clothild and her gang attack Radegund's monastery, the True Cross housed within is mentioned five times. Gregory wishes to emphasise the insult being done to this most holy of relics,⁷⁹ which reverberates with heightened consequence in this final Book of the *Histories*.

Did Gregory believe that Judgment was imminent? In a sense the question is irrelevant: it was the duty of a bishop to remain ever-alert for signs that might be interpreted in this manner, and to keep his flock in a state of spiritual readiness as far as was possible. However, Gregory's own years were advancing. In providing a list of bishops at the end of *DLH* X.31, Gregory places himself within the community of

⁷⁷ *DLH* X.13.

⁷⁸ Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* 81. As with Gregory's dispute with the Arian Agilan (*DLH* V.43, and discussed in chapter three of this thesis, 88-90, 121), this argument does not have as its main objective the persuasion of the priest, though in this case this is achieved: rather it allows Gregory to set out his position clearly for his readers.

⁷⁹ *..ante ipsam beatae crucis arcam quidam per seditionem truncati sunt* (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 502.14-15). "some [men] were cut down in a riot outside the shrine of the holy cross."

bishops who have ruled the see of Tours.⁸⁰ All previous bishops are named alongside their part in the enhancement of the see: Gregory's addition is his collection of written works. In listing these, he gives us his own obituary; it is these writings which are to be considered as his contribution to the glorification of the see. His own appearance on the register strongly hints at his anticipation of his own death; it was this, perhaps, which lay behind his consideration of the End of Days.

The Song of Songs and the Apocalypse

What did the nuns represent, and what, in the eyes of Gregory and his colleagues, had been jeopardised by the revolt? The letter from the bishops at Tours to Radegund, quoted by Gregory in *DLH* IX.49, is replete with imagery from the Song of Songs. A closer study of the significance of this proves extremely useful.

Origen of Alexandria (c.185-c.254) was the first to make extensive use of the Song as an expression of the relationship between Christ and His Church, though marital imagery was a common motif in patristic writing before Origen's time,⁸¹ and in the Gospels Jesus refers to his relationship with Church in terms of a marriage.⁸² Origen's writings were distributed in the west through the translations of his *Commentary* and

⁸⁰ As Van Dam highlights, this is the only genealogy which Gregory allows himself within the *Histories* (*Saints and their Miracles* 51).

⁸¹ It was first commented upon in Tertullian, *De oratione*, xxii (*PL* 1.1296-97). See J. Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague, 1975) 59. Later, the Book of Revelation and the Song of Songs would increasingly come to be read together "as two accounts of the same divine plan." (Matter, *Voice of my Beloved* 89).

⁸² Matt 22.2-14, Luke 12.31-40, 14.7-24 (c.f. N. Frye, *The Great Code*: 175).

Homilies, the former translated into Latin by both Rufinus and Jerome,⁸³ the latter by Jerome. The Song's Bride could, according to Origen's reading, represent both the individual soul and the Church as a whole:

“It seems to me that this little book is an epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama and sang under the figure of the Bride, about to wed and burning with heavenly love towards her Bridegroom, who is the Word of God. And deeply indeed did she love him, whether we take her as the soul made in His image, or as the Church.”⁸⁴

Origen had understood the language of the song to be applicable to the soul of any person, regardless of sex; however, during the fourth century, it came “to settle heavily, almost exclusively, on the body of the virgin woman.”⁸⁵ The writings of Ambrose were possibly even more influential.⁸⁶ For example in *De virginibus*, a letter written to his sister Marcellina in which he praises the virtues of the virgin, he makes extensive use of the Song of Songs to articulate the relationship between the virgin and Christ.⁸⁷

⁸³ Though Bugge suggests that this was never very widely disseminated. (*Virginitas* 62). We know of another three translations of the *Commentary* which have not survived: those of Victor of Pettau († ca. 304), Reticus of Autun (†.313) and Hilary of Poitiers († 367). These were probably influenced by Origen, and any or all of them could have helped in the transmission of Origen's work (Ibid.).

⁸⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. by Rufinus, in R.P. Lawson trans., *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, Ancient Christian Writers ser. (London, 1957) 21.

⁸⁵ Brown, *The Body and Society* 274.

⁸⁶ Though he left no complete exegesis, his commentary on the Song was scattered in a number of his writings, for example *De virginibus*, *De institutione virginis*, *Expositio psalmi cxviii* and *De Isaac vel anima* (PL 16.197-244; 16.319-48; 15.1257-1604; 14.523-60) (Bugge, *Virginitas* 62, n.15).

⁸⁷ *De virginibus* I.ix (PL 16.200C-203B), and trans. Rev. H. de Romestin in *Some of the Principal works of St. Ambrose*, P. Schaff and H. Wace eds., *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser, vol. X (Michigan, 1997) 370-371.

Elsewhere, the Bride of the Song is explicitly called the Church.⁸⁸ The writings appear to have been widely influential, and arguably traces can be found in Gregory's descriptions of religious women. In the Song, the Bride tells us that she has neglected her own vineyard in order to search for her husband, as a bride would leave her homeland to come to that of her new spouse.⁸⁹

The need for a girl to leave her parental home for her husband's on her marriage was also a reality for some women in Gregory's time, and we saw in chapter three of this thesis that Gregory used this crossing of borders and the resulting encounters to articulate concerns about heresy. Such marital imagery also appears in the discussions of religious women and their vocations. Monegundis⁹⁰ and Queen Ultrogotha⁹¹ are said to have left native lands to cleave to St. Martin, and therefore to Christ. In both cases the change refers not only to geographical distance but to the secular life left behind.⁹² A more obvious example of the association between a woman's religious vocation and marriage can be found in *DLH* I.47: here, a young woman tells of her wish to remain chaste in marriage, as she had promised herself only to Christ.⁹³ Radegund is described in a similar

⁸⁸ *De Spiritu Sancto* II.x:112 (PL 16.767A-767B), and trans. Romestin, *St. Ambrose* 129.

⁸⁹ Northrop Frye sees a parallel here with Psalm 45, in which a young woman is encouraged to leave her old home in favour of the new (*The Great Code* 176). He also links this to the story of Ruth, who likewise comes from a strange land to make a marriage. See also Frye, "The Bride from the Strange Land" 104-116.

⁹⁰ *VP* XIX.

⁹¹ *VSM* 1.12.

⁹² A previous marriage does not necessarily exclude women from discussions about virginity (see note 111 below).

⁹³ 'ego tibi partem tribuam dotis, quam promissam habeo ab sponso domino meo Iesu Christo, cui me et famulam devovi esse et sponsam' (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 31.15-17). "I will give you a portion of the dowry promised to me by my bridegroom Jesus Christ, to whom I have devoted myself as servant and bride."

way in the bishops' letter of foundation:⁹⁴ having followed in St. Martin's footsteps in leaving her homeland to come to Gaul, she is to make Christ her partner.⁹⁵ Many virgins, we are told, have also abandoned their natal kin to come to Radegund. This theme is echoed in *GC* 104, when, at Radegund's funeral, the nuns lament:

*'Reliquimus parentes facultatesque ac patriam et te secutae sumus.'*⁹⁶

Earlier, at *DLH* VI.29, one of the nuns at Ste. Croix had had a vision in which the abbess of the monastery disrobed her, and dressed her in *veste regia, quae tanta luce auroque et munilibus refulgebat, ut vix possit intendi*.⁹⁷ The woman, like a bride on her wedding day, was being dressed in bridal robes for the ceremony. The abbess then told her that it was Christ, her Bridegroom, who had sent her the gifts.⁹⁸

Linked to bridal imagery are images of fertility. The Song of Songs is filled with images related to cultivation, and the life-cycles of fruit, with many references to buds, flowers, nectar, vineyards, fruit and wine.⁹⁹ Likewise, we are told in the bishops' letter to Radegund that:

⁹⁴ *DLH* IX.39.

⁹⁵ Julia Smith highlights the inspiration of the Song of Songs in Fortunatus' *De virginitate*, published after Radegund's death, in which she is imagined as waiting longingly for Christ, her Bridegroom, then wishing to search for him (Smith, "Radegundis peccatrix" 315). This echoes the desires expressed in the Song, at 3.1-2.

⁹⁶ *MGH SSRM* I.2, 364.19. "We have left our parents, our resources and our country and we have followed you."

⁹⁷ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 297.10-11. "...a royal garment, which glittered so with gold and jewels that it could scarcely be conceived.

⁹⁸ *'Sponsus enim tuus mittit tibi haec munera.'* (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 297.11-12). "Your bridegroom sends you these gifts." This vision prompted the woman to enclose herself in a cell, so that she might more fully dedicate herself to Christ.

⁹⁹ See for example 2.3,5,13; 4.3,10, 13, 14, 16; 5.1; 6.7,11; 7.2,7-9,12; 8.2,11,12.

*'pius rerum arbiter tales in hereditate culturae ecclesiasticae personas
ubique disseminat, quibus agrum eius intenta operatione fidei rastro
colentibus, ad filicem centini numeri reditum divina temperiae Christi
seges valeat pervenire.'*¹⁰⁰

In Radegund, *'vestri sensus certamine fides revirescit in flore, et quod veterno tepuerat
algore senectae, tandem ferventis animi rursus incalescat ardore.'*¹⁰¹ The imagery is seasonal: after a long winter of lacklustre faith, spring has arrived again through Radegund's efforts, and her flowering will make possible an even larger harvest of souls for Christ when the time to reap arrives. So too in the Song, "winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. / The flowers have appeared in our land."¹⁰² Such imagery is also prominent in the account of Radegund's funeral given in GC 104. As she lies on her bier, her face is more beautiful than lilies or roses; the nuns of her monastery are described as having "blossomed" in their chosen vocation. Their lament is also revealing:

*'Qui quocumque loco accedebamus, contemplantes gloriosam faciem
tuam, ibi inveniebamus aurum, ibi argentum; ibi suspiciebamus
florentes vineas segitesque comantes; ibi prata diversorum florum
varietate vernantia. A te carpiebamus violas, tu nobis eras rosa rutilans
et lilium candens.'*¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ MGH SSRM I.1, 461.3-5. "the holy judge of all things is sending out everywhere men to cultivate the inheritance of the church, who with strenuous work till the fields with their plough of faith, so that, by divine tempering, Christ's harvest may bring forth a hundredfold."

¹⁰¹ IX.39, MGH SSRM I.1, 461.17-19. "the flowers of faith bloom again through the striving of your heart, and that which had grown cold in the long winter of old age at last grows warm by the fire of your fervent mind."

¹⁰² Song of Songs 2.11-12.

¹⁰³ MGH SSRM I.2, 365.2-6. "Wherever we went, when we contemplated your glorious face we found there gold and silver; there we admired blossoming vineyards, flowing cornfields, and meadows blooming with a

There is vineyard and harvest imagery throughout the Song, and the Bride describes herself as “the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.”¹⁰⁴

The Bride is linked to “a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them,”¹⁰⁵ an image which links the theme of fertility with that of a shepherd’s duties. This image, strong throughout the Book, is perhaps the one that was most influential in the adoption of the Song of Songs as an allegory for Christ’s relationship to His Church. Commonly used to depict the duties of a bishop towards his congregation, it is also applied to Radegund, whose nuns “flocked” to her from their homes.¹⁰⁶ The allusion is also made by Caesarius in his Rule for Nuns.¹⁰⁷

It is clear that the commitment of a woman religious to Christ lends itself more readily to comparisons with marriage than the equivalent commitment made by a man. It also lends itself quite readily to use as a literary expression of the relationship between Christ and His Church. In the last two Books of the *Histories*, these images are brought to bear on discussions about the End of Days.

variety of different flowers. From you we picked violets; for us, you were a glowing red rose and a brilliant white lily.”

¹⁰⁴ Song of Songs 2.1. For images associated with vineyards, see 1.6, 14, 2.13, 15, 7.7,8,12, 8.11, 12; harvest imagery: 7.2.

¹⁰⁵ Song of Songs 6.5.

¹⁰⁶ *convolasse* (DLH IX.39, MGH SSRM I.1, 462.11).

¹⁰⁷ “If a girl, leaving her parents, desires to renounce the world and enter the holy fold to escape the jaws of the spiritual wolves by the help of God, she must never, up to the time of her death, go out of the monastery, nor into the basilica, where there is a door” (Caesarius of Arles, *The Rule for Nuns* 2, trans. McCarthy 171).

The Rule followed by the nuns at Ste. Croix was that of Caesarius. William Klingshirn suggests that, in forming the community of nuns at Arles, Caesarius wished to provide an example of the perfect Christian life.¹⁰⁸ More recently, Lindsay Rudge has argued that he rather saw the monastery as “a symbol of [his] hopes for the salvation of the city’s inhabitants.”¹⁰⁹ Beyond the symbolic, the nuns were expected to pray for their patrons, so discord within the monastery jeopardised prospects of salvation for the wider community.¹¹⁰ It is possible to analyse the symbolic importance of the nuns further: Caesarius attached great significance to the body of the virgin dedicated to Christ, as he makes quite clear in *Sermo CLV*, “because the blessed apostle has called the whole Catholic Church a virgin – considering in it not only those virgin in body, but desiring uncorrupted minds in all.”¹¹¹ The community of nuns, all of whom had dedicated their lives to the services of Christ, represented in an idealised form the relationship between Christ and the Catholic Church.¹¹² A community of virgins, Peter Brown has suggested, stood for all that was unchangeable and reliable in the city.¹¹³ Just as theatres and other public buildings represented to contemporaries the glory of the Empire at its height, nunneries represented the glory of Christendom.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994) 102.

¹⁰⁹ L. Rudge, *Texts and Contexts: Women’s Dedicated Life from Caesarius to Benedict* (unpublished PhD. Thesis, St. Andrews, 2006) 65.

¹¹⁰ *Vita Caesarii* I.28, Eng. trans. W. E. Klingshirn ed., *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters* (Liverpool, 1994) 22.

¹¹¹ *Sermo CLV*, p. 599, *Opera* I, pt. ii. It should be understood that “virginity was more a state of mind than the bodily condition of an unpenetrated hymen” (Smith, “Radegundis peccatrix” 304).

¹¹² “The glory of the religious state is that it most perfectly reflects the espousals of the Church to her Divine Bridegroom” (McCarthy, “Introduction” to *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles* 58).

¹¹³ Brown, *The Body and Society* 271.

¹¹⁴ McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius* 27.

The female body, as we have seen, carries a heavy weight of symbolism. The chaste female represents not only an ideal form of Christian life, but also represents the impenetrable church. Chaste men are of course also living a more ideal form of Christian life, but their bodies do not have the same symbolic value. Women must not only control their own desires, but must avoid provoking those of men. David Hunter notes that demands for clerical celibacy in the later fourth century coincided with the emergence of a ritual for the veiling of religious women: in other words, when clerics were required to exercise more control over their sexual desires, greater control was demanded over women who associated with and might therefore tempt them.¹¹⁵ This represented “a new formal relationship of the virgin to Christ and to the Christian community, a relationship mediated by the Christian bishop.”¹¹⁶

Women’s weaker nature makes them more subject to temptation, their weaker physical bodies make them more vulnerable to attack. Guidance for the preservation of virginity, and praise of this state, are the subjects of many treatises and sermons written by men.¹¹⁷ Jerome’s letter to Eustochium extols the virtues of virginity,¹¹⁸ and Ambrose of Milan argues that “[i]n holy virgins we see on earth the life of the angels we lost in

¹¹⁵ D. G. Hunter, “Clerical Celibacy and the Veiling of Virgins: New Boundaries in Late Ancient Christianity”, in W. E. Klingshirn and M. Vessey eds., *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honour of R. A. Markus* (Michigan, 1999) 139.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 143.

¹¹⁷ T. M. Shaw, “Creation, Virginity and Diet in Fourth-Century Christianity: Basil of Ancyra’s *On the True Purity of Virginity*”, in Maria Wyke ed., *Gender and the Body in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 1998) 155.

¹¹⁸ *Ep. XXII (PL 22)*.

paradise.”¹¹⁹ The idea that virginity could represent a return to the conditions of paradise is supported by Jerome, who notes, drawing on Genesis 4:1, that Adam and Eve did not have sex until after the Fall, when they had been banished from the gates of Eden.¹²⁰ Gregory appears to follow this account of the Fall: in his account, it is only after the expulsion that intercourse occurs and Eve conceives a child.¹²¹

The Song of Songs contains imagery linking it strongly with the Garden of Eden. It was believed that, at the Second Coming, Christ would restore the world to its Paradisal state. In the letter to Radegund, the bishops praise the queen for her efforts, which shine forth in spite of the fact that “the world waxeth old.” Communities of nuns – and of monks – have been elected to represent the community of Paradise on earth. To wish to leave the community is an idea that could only occur with the Devil’s prompting, as Eve’s temptation by the Devil in serpent’s guise resulted in Man’s original banishment. The chapters of the *Histories* covering the revolt, including the various documents quoted, mention the Devil no less than five times.¹²²

In a way that a community of men cannot, nuns represent, collectively and individually, the church’s integrity and purity. Each is a bride of Christ, but collectively they represent the cleansed Church which is itself the Bride of Christ.

¹¹⁹ *De institutione virginis*, civ (PL 16.345). See Bugge, *Virginitas* 31. Athanasius of Alexandria expressed a similar sentiment to the Emperor Constantine II in 356. (*Apologia ad Constantium* 33.49 (PG 25.640B), cf. Brown, *The Body and Society* 259.

¹²⁰ “*Eva in paradiso virgo fuit: post pelliceas tunicas, initium sumpsit nuptiarum*” (Ep. XXII, xix (PL 22.102), cf. Bugge, *Virginitas* 22.

¹²¹ *DLH* I.1-2.

¹²² *MGH SSRM* I.1, 460.1; 463.1-3, 463.5; 468.9-10; 501.3.

Claustration, food and sex in the religious house

Inasmuch as the religious house was a flagship for a higher level of Christian living, so the status of the church was heavily invested in the success and reputation of such houses, and the status of an individual churchman could become tied up with the reputation of an individual monastery. The more secluded a nun was, the more remote was the chance that her chastity would ever fall under suspicion. This was, Bonnie Effros suggests, why Caesarius insisted on claustration in his Rule.¹²³ Chastity was not a purely physical matter. It could be threatened simply by impure thoughts. Thus Jerome did not believe that women who walked about in the world could truly be virgins, as “their spirits were polluted by worldly matters.”¹²⁴ They might be able to cast their eyes downwards, but they could not blind themselves completely to the sights and sounds of life outwith the safety of the monastery. Lindsay Rudge suggests an alternative interpretation, pointing out the differences between Caesarius’s letter of instruction to the community at St. John, and the later *Regula virginum*. The latter has a much heavier insistence on claustration: Rudge suggests that this had much to do with the practical concern of allowing the nuns to live their chosen life, and drew on the experience of the nuns themselves.¹²⁵

It goes without saying that a woman dedicated to Christ is not sexually available to any mortal man. In the fourth century Basil of Caesaria proposed that a woman who had taken the veil, but subsequently left the nunnery and married, should be subject to the

¹²³ *Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul* (New York, 2002) 44.

¹²⁴ J. A. Smith, *Ordering Women’s Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West* (Aldershot, 2001) 116.

¹²⁵ Rudge, *Texts and Contexts* 62.

penalties of an adulteress.¹²⁶ In the sixth century this was reinforced in the canons of the Church Councils.¹²⁷ The nun's status was not unassailable. Canon 28 of the Council of Tours in 567 forbade women's monasteries to be built near those of men, "as well because of the cunning of Satan as because of the evil report of men."¹²⁸ Caesarius links desire to original sin through the image of the serpent, admonishing one who sees her sister behave in an unrestrained manner to first rebuke her, then if she persists in her wrongdoing, to tell the mother, as "if she had been bitten by a serpent, and she wished to hide this because she feared to be cut, would it not be cruel to remain silent, and merciful to reveal it? How much more therefore ought you to expose the plans of the devil and the wiles of that infamous one, lest the wound of sin be deepened in the heart, lest the evil of concupiscence be nourished for a long time in the breast."¹²⁹ Desire is a threat to monastic vocation, and a woman who leaves the monastery and takes a husband will, along with the husband himself, be considered an adulterer, as she has broken faith with her spiritual partner.

In *Histories* IX.39 the letter from the bishops to Radegund confirms that any woman who leaves the institution after committing to the life there will be defiled. The letter writers compare the desertion of the monastery to a fall from grace. The language

¹²⁶ Letter 199.18 107, and cf. Brown, *The Body and Society* 274.

¹²⁷ The fifth council of Orleans of 549 proposed that such a woman should be excommunicated (Canon 19). See also the Canon 21 (20) of the Council of Tours, 567, where such a woman is specifically compared to an adulteress. *Si enim de hominibus haec ratio custoditur, ut, quaecumque vivente viro altero nupserit, habeatur adultera, quanto magis et illa damnanda est, quae se ante immortale sponso coniunxerat et postea ad humanas nuptias transmigravit?* (*Concilia Galliae*, CCSL vol. cxlviii A, 185, and (partial) trans. Hefele, *A History of the Councils* 392).

¹²⁸ *Concilia Galliae*, CCSL vol. cxlviii 180 and Hefele, *A History of the Councils* 81.

¹²⁹ Caesarius, *The Rule for Nuns* 24, trans. McCarthy 178.

of defilement is strong and clear: the nuns ‘*debeant inviolabiliter custodire, quod videntur libente semel animo suscepisse, quoniam contaminare non decet Christo fides caelo teste promissa, ubi non leve scaelus est, templum Dei, quod absit, pollui.*’¹³⁰ The very act of leaving the monastery is linked to dangerous desire: if “inflamed by some allurements of a distracted mind” she should wish to leave the monastery, she can expect to be punished. That such an event would pollute the temple of God – that is, the monastery – itself, indicates the fragility of the institution’s state of grace, and the necessity, therefore, of absolute vigilance.

Women were usually, for reasons already suggested, more closely cloistered than their male counterparts. They also appear in some cases to have been governed by stricter dietary regulations. This appears to be due to the perceived link between food and sex. For everyone, the senses act as “channels, windows, or gateways to the soul, allowing entry to the sensual experience that can lead to lustful fantasies and propel one toward sexual conduct.”¹³¹ Anyone who wished to govern sexual behaviour must be wary of any sensual stimulation. The sense of taste was thought to be particularly powerful in this regard. When “the stomach grows heavy with food, it becomes necessary for the organs underneath it, which are overflowing with humors bubbling inside, to move toward their natural function.”¹³² Women, particularly prone to sexual temptation in any case, must

¹³⁰ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 462.13-16. The nuns “must keep inviolate that which they once undertook with willing mind, since they ought not to contaminate the promise made to Christ with heaven as witness, for it is no light crime, which God forbid, to pollute the temple of God” .

¹³¹ Shaw, “Creation, Virginité and Diet” 160.

¹³² Basil of Ancyra, *De virg.* 7, *PG* 30.684B, trans. in Shaw, “Creation” 161. Men and women were made up of different combinations of the four humours – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – which were each affected in different ways by different foods. Rich food was thought to provoke a particularly adverse reaction in a woman (*Ibid.*).

exercise greater care over food consumption in order to subdue carnal desire. The connection between food and sex was also explicated by Jerome, in his letter to Furia.¹³³

Food regulations are not unique to religious communities. The wider Christian community imposed regulations, such as fasts on certain days and over particular periods, in an attempt to impose control on the arbitrary periods of plenty and want that characterise lives in times of poverty.¹³⁴ Dietary regulations were particularly strict in religious houses. Those who live in such communities, because of the higher level of dedication involved, could be considered to be in a more vulnerable state, and must therefore work to maintain stricter controls over the gateways of their bodies. Strict dietary restrictions also allow them to signal their membership of a Christian elite, which has gateways of its own. As in St. John's Revelation, which itself, as we will see, expressed the fears of a small community perceiving itself to be menaced by wider society, concern with the community's boundaries manifests itself as concern with individual boundaries.¹³⁵

¹³³ *Ep. i.54 (PL 22.282-94)*. Woman's relationship to Eve must also be held partly responsible for added constraints on nuns' diets. Eve's apple opened the door to the possibility of all sin. This action forever problematises the relation of women to food, their consumption of it and particularly their provision of it for others. Eve's proffering of the apple to Adam is frequently imagined as an act of seduction, and was, in the thinking of Basil of Ancyra, the precursor of sex (Shaw, "Creation" 158).

¹³⁴ "[I]n pre-industrial societies, where resources are limited, men and women frequently respond to the rhythm of plenty and scarcity, harvest and famine, by deciding to control it through voluntary fasting and believe that they can in this way coerce from the gods dreams and visions, health, good fortune, or fertility" (C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987) 34).

¹³⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 98-106.

Some monastic Rules for women, that of Caesarius among them, imposed restrictions on a nunnery's capacity to provide food for guests¹³⁶ (monks, meanwhile, were generally permitted to provide *convivia*). This rule was rather harsh and somewhat unrealistic, given a nunnery's desperate need to attract patronage.¹³⁷ Providing food was one of the most effective ways of doing this, particularly as nuns could not visit possible patrons to solicit contributions. If by chance a food miracle, evidence of the holy power present in the institution, were to occur while guests were present, so much the better. It seems that Radegund ignored this aspect of Caesarius's Rule, and that Leubovera attempted to do the same.¹³⁸

Such governance of the individual body also has practical applications: individuals must work to maintain the status of this collective elite: the boundaries of an institution are only as impermeable as those on either side perceive them to be. Outsiders will view what lies within as having integrity only if those within can achieve and maintain a reputation for maintaining personal boundaries. Thus it is very possible that the security of an institution depended very much on the reputation of those within.

Women in Revelation

The housing of a relic of the True Cross in the nunnery at Poitiers may have heightened apocalyptic feeling surrounding the events at this institution in particular. However, it should be emphasised that the gender of the malcontents was in itself

¹³⁶ Effros, *Creating Community* 54.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³⁸ Several of Fortunatus's *Carmina* celebrate the hospitality of Radegund and the abbess Agnes, and gifts of food that they had given him. See for example *Carmina* 11.13,4,9,23.

vital to the creation of the apocalyptic mood of the *Histories*' last two books. The image of the woman out of control is a symbol of chaos, which also makes its appearance in the Book of Revelation.¹³⁹ The dichotomy of good and evil women is also crucial. This is made explicit in IX.39, when Gregory holds before Clothild the example of Radegund's humility:

*infelix ac facilis non recordans, in qua se humilitate beata Radegundis,
quae hoc instituit monasterium , exhibebat.*¹⁴⁰

Women feature prominently in Books IX and X of the *Histories*: there are virtuous women whom Gregory admires, such as Radegund and Ingoberg, the widow of King Charibert. Gregory describes the latter, a former queen who had devoted herself to religion, as one who "truly feared God." There is also a brave young woman who successfully defends her chastity from the rapacious intentions of one Duke Amalo, striking him with a sword "as Judith smote Holofernes."¹⁴¹ In likening her to a religious heroine, Gregory gives a secular story a strong spiritual flavour, and the young woman, in defending her bodily integrity, becomes a defender of the Church's integrity also.

At the other end of the scale there are the nuns of Poitiers, and closer to home, Ingtrude and Berthegund, who argued between themselves over the future of the

¹³⁹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast* 97-112.

¹⁴⁰ *MGH SSRM* I.1, 460.8-9. "this unhappy woman, not easily calling to mind the humility of the blessed Radegund, who founded the monastery."

¹⁴¹ *DLH* IX.27, and see chapter one of this thesis, 30-1.

former's nunnery.¹⁴² Rauching's wife may be another example of the negative possibilities in female nature. She is a woman committed to earthly pleasures, who learns a hard lesson about their futility. She reminds us of the Whore of Babylon, "gilt with gold, and precious stones and pearls," on her steed.¹⁴³ She, like the city / woman Babylon wears the riches gained through shady political dealings, a symbol of her husband's rapacious greed *ultra humanum genus*.¹⁴⁴ She is headed for church, but when she sees the messenger who bears the news of her husband's capture and death, she *proiectis in terra ornamentis, in basilicam sancti Medardi antestitis confugit, ibique se tutare confessores praesidio putans*.¹⁴⁵ Attachment to worldly riches on the one hand, and salvation on the other, are mutually exclusive, and Rauching's wife casts the former aside in order to put her faith in God's provision for her.

What is the literary significance of such a prominence of women in the *DLH*'s last two Books? A dichotomy of female characters is also important to the final book of the New Testament. Here, there are four figures: two virtuous and two evil. These are the Woman Clothed by the Sun, "a constellation of images, primarily of the mother of the messiah and the mother of the faithful, as the "new Israel", "the church",¹⁴⁶ and the "new

¹⁴² There is further mother-daughter fighting between Queen Fredegund and her daughter Rictrude. Driven to the end of her tether by her daughter's insults, Fredegund attempts to choke her by trapping her head in a chest of treasures. Neither woman is particularly admirable, and Gregory mentions that the cause of many of their arguments was *quia Rigundis adulteria sequebatur* (*DLH* IX.34, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 455.14-15).

¹⁴³ Revelation 17.4.

¹⁴⁴ *DLH* IX.9, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 422.18.

¹⁴⁵ *DLH* IX.9, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 423. 7-8. "she threw her ornaments down to the ground, took refuge in the basilica of the holy bishop Medard, thinking that she would find safety under the protection of the confessor."

¹⁴⁶ Streete, *The Strange Woman* 153.

Jerusalem”, and on the other side “Jezebel” and the Whore of Babylon. Unpicking these images offers instructive insights into Gregory’s purpose.

Revelation draws on the two-woman topos, wherein the reader is invited to choose between two paths, represented by two women. The first path is righteous and true, but more arduous, and represented often by a woman dressed in simple, elegant sobriety. The second path is the way of evil, paved with luxury and sexual excess, its representative richly dressed and heavily made-up. This choice is familiar to readers of Proverbs 1-9.¹⁴⁷ In Revelation, the choice presented to the reader is that between the Imperial City of Babylon, represented by the Great Whore, and the new church, the city of Jerusalem, represented by the Woman Clothed by the Sun.

The writer of Revelations is heavily influenced by, in particular, the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. In the Hebrew prophets, cities and the nation of Israel are often represented as women. Thus when a city or nation strays from the faith, its deserved punishment is imagined as the torture of a woman for the crime of adultery.¹⁴⁸ This tactic is also employed by John in the Book of Revelation. The Whore of Babylon’s libidinous and drunken behaviour is a graphic illustration of the godlessness of Empire. She is seated, or enthroned; a grave impropriety as only God is enthroned.

¹⁴⁷ Woman Wisdom is “more precious than all riches: and all the things that are desired, are not to be compared to her” (Prov. 3.15), while “the lips of a harlot are like a honeycomb dropping, and her throat is smoother than oil. / But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two-edged sword. / Her feet go down into death, and her steps go in as far as hell” (Prov. 5.3-5). There are also classical resonances: Paris, the son of Priam, the king of Troy, was presented with a choice between wisdom, beauty and prowess in war, chose the gift of the most beautiful woman in the world, offered by Aphrodite.

¹⁴⁸ See above, ch. 3 107.

Points of comparison between the good and evil figures centre around the issues of food and sex, which are both “boundary issues.”¹⁴⁹ The social situation in which St. John wrote made it understandable that he would perceive the Christian community as threatened. Christians were a minority, and often the subject of persecutions. Thus they are urged to maintain austerity in appetite and to govern sexual behaviour. In doing so, they attempted to govern the boundaries of their individual community.

The figures of Jezebel and Babylon both have impure eating habits. Politically, Babylon, who goes as far as drinking blood in a parody of the Eucharist, represents the threat to the Christian community from Imperial power, and John invites the reader to resist the draw of this power, along with its riches, in order to choose the New Jerusalem.¹⁵⁰ The lack of concern with personal boundaries that Babylon and Jezebel show marks them clearly as being outwith the true Christian community. The evil figures of Revelation are contrasted with the good, who exercise governance over appetite. The unnamed woman clothed by sun is nourished only by God, and goes into the wilderness trusting in God’s provision for her.

It is the contrast between Radegund and Clothild which frames the account of the Poitiers revolt. As with the figures in Revelation, food is of some importance: Radegund

¹⁴⁹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast* 98.

¹⁵⁰ Duff suggests that John has a more personal concern with the figure of Jezebel. This woman – Jezebel is not her real name – appears to have been John’s rival. In choosing the name Jezebel for her, he of course links her to the famous original, worshipper of Baal, and persecutor of the prophet Elijah. John thus aligns himself with the authority of the true prophet, and his rival with false religions. He uses food and sex to heighten the connection, linking “Jezebel” with the gluttonous harlot Babylon (*Who Rides the Beast* 97-112).

was famous for her ascetic eating habits;¹⁵¹ Clothild complains about not having enough to eat.¹⁵² There is also some allusion to the central Biblical dichotomy of female figures, Eve and Mary. Like Eve, Clothild has been tempted by the Devil,¹⁵³ and leads others away from a blissful state of nearness to and service of God. Radegund has, like Mary, reached the paradoxical state of perpetual virginity,¹⁵⁴ and is regarded as a mother who has provided many women with the opportunity for salvation:¹⁵⁵ her tireless prayers had saved many more.

The trial

Invited to make her case to the bishops assembled in council, Clothild first accused the abbess Leubovera of having sex with a man disguised as a woman, who she kept at the nunnery especially for this purpose. However, the man lived some forty miles away from Poitiers, and knew the abbess only by name.¹⁵⁶ Clothild then claimed that the abbess was in the habit of making men eunuchs and keeping them at the monastery as servants. There was indeed one such servant to be found at the monastery, but this man had been operated on as a child, on Radegund's orders, for health reasons.¹⁵⁷ Neither of these accusations is to be found in the *Text of the Judgment* (X.16) itself: perhaps the bishops did not consider such wild accusations to be worthy of inclusion.

¹⁵¹ *VR I* 15, 16, 21, 22; *VR II* 4, 5, 8,

¹⁵² *DLH X.16, MGH SSRM I.1, 505.13.*

¹⁵³ *DLH IX.39, MGH SSRM I.1, 460.1.*

¹⁵⁴ See above, n. 111.

¹⁵⁵ *DLH IX.39, MGH SSRM I.1, 462.4-6.*

¹⁵⁶ *DLH X.15, MGH SSRM I.1, 504.5-13.*

¹⁵⁷ *DLH X.15, MGH SSRM I.1, 504.14-22.*

Clothild also accused Leubovera of failing to feed and clothe the nuns properly, playing backgammon, allowing servants to use bathing facilities intended for the nuns, and of entertaining visitors. Another issue raised was that of the abbess's niece, whose engagement party seems to have been celebrated within the nunnery walls, and for whom the abbess made a garment from some cloth donated to the nunnery.

From the beginning of Gregory's account, it is clear that, for Clothild and Basina, the source of irritation is the lack of acknowledgment, on the part of the abbess, of their royal status.¹⁵⁸ They should not have had to suffer such deprivations as lack of food or insufficient clothing, let alone having to share their baths with servants. They apparently object to Leubovera attempting to ape the customs of Radegund, a queen, in playing backgammon and entertaining visitors. The nuns should have left their worldly status behind on entering the monastery. In complaining that their treatment did not befit this former status, and in choosing to go to their royal relatives to report this, they failed to acknowledge this.

The bishops choose to frame the complaints in a rather different way. Food and clothing should be part of the symbolism by which the nuns set themselves apart. They choose to accept the statements of the abbess, that the allowances of both are sufficient. For the bishops, the problem of the nuns having to share bathing facilities with servants is not one of class; instead it presents difficulties for the nuns' vows of claustration. This is also true of entertaining visitors: Radegund's status and contacts placed her beyond

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 36. Of course, Clothild and Basina did not share Radegund's vocation (Ibid 34-5).

reproach, but this is not the case for Leubovera. The bishops are unconcerned that Leubovera copied Radegund in playing parlour games despite not sharing the queen's status; instead they worried about the appropriateness of nuns engaging in such activities at all. The behaviour of nuns ought to set them apart from the masses.

The most fascinating tangle of issues surrounds the abbess' niece. Again, there is concern with boundaries here. The young woman is about to enter on a marriage, and is therefore of a different vocation, as she will become sexually available to a mortal man. Her very presence in the monastery might have been considered inappropriate. Clothild raised an objection to the use of part of the altar cloth to make a garment for the girl. Smarting over the restriction of her own clothing allowance, it must have been rather galling to see this girl - presumably, like her aunt, of lower standing than Clothild – given such sumptuous trimmings for her clothes. For the bishops, the key to the matter is the abbess's defence that she had cut off a section from a piece of cloth that had been given to her, *before* making the rest into an altar cloth. Therefore no part of the altar cloth itself had been used. A piece of gold trim, which Clothild had alleged had been taken from the border of the altar cloth and placed around the niece's neck, had in fact been purchased with money from the young woman's fiancé. As far as the bishops were concerned, the vital boundary between the spiritual and the worldly had been respected, and so the abbess had no charges to answer.

Clothild and Basina were another matter. Not only had they been disobedient, and broken their Rule by walking out of their institution, but because of their reckless actions,

the sacred space of the monastery had been violated, and blood had been shed not only at Ste. Croix, but also in the basilica of St. Hilary.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, sacred boundaries had been breached in the form of the bodies of individual nuns: many of those who had walked out in revolt in support of Clothild and Basina had married and become pregnant while waiting for the dispute to be resolved.¹⁶⁰

The bishops' council as presented here by Gregory is episcopal authority unified and idealised; Heinzelmänn has highlighted the fact that the bishops are unnamed, lending them a universal feel.¹⁶¹ They work in concord, their decisions backed by royal authority: a microcosm, then, of Gregory's vision of the governing of society. However, the *Text of the Judgment* and the trial's aftermath are all too revealing of the limitations of episcopal power. Just as it required an order from the kings to bring the Council together, so most of the findings of the council are offered to the kings as merely a set of suggestions, which will come to naught without the kings' approval and active support.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ DLH X.16, MGH SSRM I.1, 507-8.

¹⁶⁰ DLH X.16, MGH SSRM I.1, 507.

¹⁶¹ Heinzelmänn, *Gregory of Tours*, 74-5.

¹⁶² The bishops asked that kings Guntram and Childebert to compel the nuns to return some stolen property to the monastery, and left it to their discretion to decide whether to allow the nuns to return to the monastery in the future. They did, however, remind the kings that the nuns had committed the most execrable crimes, and warned that to allow them to return would be to risk an even greater calamity. '*De cetero quod de rebus monasterii vel instrumentis cartarum domnorum regum parentum vestrorum de loco subreptum est, quae se habere professae sunt, sed nobis inoboedientes nullatenus erunt voluntarie redditurae, qualiter vestra vel anteriorum principum merces aeterna permaneat, ad loci instauratione vestrae pietatis atque potestatis est auctoritate regia cogi reformare; neque ipsas ad locum, quem tam impie ac profanissime distruxerunt, ne peiora proveniant, vel redire concedite vel permittatis iterum adspirare*' (MGH SSRM I.1, 508.20-25). "For the rest it lieth with your piety and your mightiness by royal authority to compel restitution to their rightful place of the property taken from the monastery and the deeds of gift granted by the kings your fathers which these nuns removed, and now openly detain, regardless of us, refusing of their own free will to give them back, that so your own benefactions and those of your predecessors may endure for ever, and the place be restored to proper hands. Furthermore, it lieth with you to deny them permission to return, or even the hope of returning, to the place which in this impious and sacrilegious wise they have laid waste, lest worse things befall'" (trans. Dalton, *History of the*

Radegund had subtly exploited the tensions between the sees of Poitiers and Tours in such a way that her monastery itself became a focus of animosity between the bishops of these sees. In spite of experiencing problems with a powerful religious woman at Tours, Gregory is critical of Maroveus' handling of the revolt.¹⁶³ This of course presented Gregory with sufficient excuse to intervene.¹⁶⁴ When help from Maroveus was not forthcoming, Radegund sought assistance from King Sigibert and from the bishops of Tours. It has not, until this point, been noted that in seeking out Gregory, Clothild did the same. Moreover, in seeking out her uncle, King Guntram, Clothild was not simply looking to appeal to a royal figure who was likely to have sympathy for her chagrin at the disdain shown for her own royal status. She was also appealing to a king who had only recently surrendered his claim to Poitiers, in November 587,¹⁶⁵ who might conceivably relish the opportunity to involve himself in the city's affairs once more, and who possibly bore some animosity towards Maroveus, who had resisted his attempt to appropriate control of the city in 585.¹⁶⁶ Gregory had highlighted the contrast between Radegund's humility and Clothild's sinful pride, but in fact Radegund never stopped being a queen.¹⁶⁷

Franks 453-4). In fact, Basina was eventually allowed to return, after Childebert made a request on her behalf, and after she had begged Leubovera's forgiveness. Clothild refused to humble herself, and was granted an estate to live on by the king, having suffered no punishment (*DLH* X.20, c.f. Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 31-2).

¹⁶³ *DLH* IX.40 (*MGH SSRM* I.1, 465.2-3).

¹⁶⁴ C.f. Rosenwein, "Inaccessible Cloisters" 195.

¹⁶⁵ By the Treaty of Andelot (see *DLH* IX.20, *MGH SSRM* I.1, 435.15-8).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles* 37.

¹⁶⁷ Radegund's monastic career was, as Scheibelreiter points out at some length, a harmony between her royal status and religious vocation ("Königstöchter im Kloster" 33-4). The latter could not have been successful without the alliances formed while at court (the most important being, of course, her former husband, who eventually endorsed her project) and the air of command afforded by her royal upbringing, which allowed her to communicate on a more-than-equal footing with bishops. Entertaining at the monastery had seen the former queen take on in a new context the role of lady of the hall, which she had resolutely refused to play as King Chlothar's wife. Despite having submitted herself to Agnes, Radegund

The clergy generally acknowledged her as such; Scheibelreiter suggests that it may have been Maroveus' refusal, or inability, to do so which lay at the root of much of the animosity between them.¹⁶⁸ Radegund sought out a relic of the True Cross because the Cross was a symbol of rulership: when Clothild found herself surrounded at the oratory where the relic was kept, she too, holding the cross, invoked this regal status, associating it explicitly with her own:

*'sum regina, filia regis regisque alterius consubrina'*¹⁶⁹

But whereas Radegund confined her machinations to society's highest echelons, Clothild may have taken advantage of political divisions further down the social scale. The thugs that she recruited to break into Ste. Croix may have included a number of fugitives who were taking advantage of Poitiers' shifting political landscape, and any resultant unrest, to stay one step ahead of their pursuers.¹⁷⁰

The trial of the nuns, intended by Gregory to represent an idealised vision of episcopal authority, in fact demonstrates the limitations of this authority all too clearly. From the beginning of the revolt, the concern of individual bishops with their own

also remained a queenly figure in the eyes of the other nuns. Baudonivia gives a telling account of a punishment meted out posthumously to a slave girl who had failed to respect her memory (*VR II* ch.12).

¹⁶⁸ Scheibelreiter, "Königstöchter im Kloster" 22.

¹⁶⁹ *DLH X.15, MGH SSRM I.1*, 503.22. "I am a queen, daughter of one king and cousin of another."

¹⁷⁰ These probably included one Childeric the Saxon, who may have been involved with the Pretender Gundovald (Dalton, *History of the Franks* 343 n. 6) and who Gregory tells us was thought to be one of the Ste. Croix revolt's ringleaders (*DLH X.22*). We are also told that the sons of Waddo, whose estate had been given to Clothild, were at that point roaming the area of Poitiers, committing all sorts of crimes. Count Macco was enlisted to bring them to justice. Were they among those captured at Ste. Croix? After they unsuccessfully appealed to Childebert, they were tortured and revealed the location of their father's treasure. Did this treasure form part of the estate that Clothild was given? If so, it may be that, in giving Clothild the estate, Childebert was attempting to break up a potentially troublesome alliance? Gregory's writing style makes it rather difficult to discern, and this is not the place to try to unpick, just how far the revolt at Ste. Croix was bound up with other tensions at Poitiers at the time.

prestige had been a part of the problem. The nuns manipulated this status-consciousness. The trial revealed that the bishops, in implementing the necessary penalties for those who had caused such a grave injury not only to their own institution but the social fabric of the town of Poitiers, were dependant on the support of the kings.

Conclusion

The nuns' revolt at Poitiers formed a crucial part of Gregory's strategy in the final two books of the *Histories*. The final two books of this work saw a gradual intensification of focus on the Last Days, for political as well as spiritual reasons. We have seen the way in which Gregory was able to contain and dismiss rivals by claiming that they were false prophets, such as had been promised by God. Apocalypticism also helped in the management of the nuns' revolt itself: the chaos of the revolt could again be explained with reference to the expected events of the Last Days, and the resolution of the conflict allowed Gregory to create a powerful typological image of the community of saints sitting in judgment.

This chapter examined the usefulness of nuns to bishops in their thinking about salvation, as they imagined the Church cleansed of all sin as the pure virgin Bride of Christ, and the Final Judgment. Women's bodies, if the women were chaste, could represent individually and collectively this purified Church, and the women themselves advertised an exemplary form of Christian living. However, this purity was precarious and needed protection, and the rules imposed on the female religious were designed to ensure this. They had to guard the gateways of their bodies, and so guard their collective

body, from the temptations of the outside world and from intrusion by impure elements. Not only were they not to go about in the world, but unsuitable people – even other women – were not to be allowed in.

Attention was drawn to the connection between these rules and the concerns expressed by St. John in his Revelation. He, like the bishops who promulgated women's monastic rules, sought to protect a fragile minority from pollution through the infiltration of outsiders. Nuns were a minority within Christianity itself, and the boundaries of their institution would be far more likely to be respected by outsiders and their way of life regarded as holy and separate if they could gain a reputation for chastity and austerity.

Nuns held enormous symbolic significance for bishops. Because of this, a bishop's reputation could become heavily invested in the success of those monastic institutions in his diocese, and he naturally sought a measure of control over them. However, ideals of nuns' behaviour, as represented in the writings examined here, sometimes sat uneasily with the reality of monastic life. The nuns' revolt brought into focus the problems that could occur with this juxtaposition. Although the bishops could brandish the Rule and foundation letters to point out to the nuns how far they had erred, the nuns could equally demand that they be given adequate provision to live by the Rule.

It is certainly the case that Radegund manipulated the tension between the sees of Poitiers and Tours, which had perhaps existed since the two towns had quarrelled over the St. Martin's body. This chapter argues that Clothild followed her example, but with

the crucial difference that while Radegund wished to see an end to civil strife and petitioned her stepsons to this end, Clothild may have tried to use the tension between Guntram and Childebert for her own ends.

In spite of the fact that Gregory emphasises episcopal authority, and in particular, its unity, in his portrayal of the dispute's resolution, the revolt if anything highlights the limits of this authority. It was not enough to break up the revolt; it took the local Count acting on royal orders to achieve this. And in spite of the severity of the crimes committed by the revolt's ringleaders, Childebert still felt able to ask for the sentences of excommunication to be overturned. Though Basina did what was required of her in begging forgiveness of the abbess, Clothild refused and was nevertheless given an estate to live on by the King.¹⁷¹

Both Van Dam and Scheibelreiter have pointed out that the behaviour of the bishops involved with the Ste. Croix dispute is characterised by partisanship and jostling for position. Gregory is hardly innocent of this: indeed, he and his immediate predecessor, Eufronius, seem to have exploited the close relationship which developed, at first out of necessity but later as much through choice, between St. Martin and his see on the one hand and Ste. Croix on the other. Gregory's interventions to help bring the dispute to a close helped enhance his personal prestige. Through his literary depiction of the revolt and its resolution, and his active participation in the latter, Gregory was able to associate himself, his see and St. Martin with the relic of the True Cross at Poitiers, and

¹⁷¹ *DLH* X.20.

therefore with salvation. It was a valuable legacy to leave to his successors at Tours, who would carry on the work of preparing the flock after his death.

Conclusion

Gregory is dangerous. We know that he chiselled, shaped and cut the events of his own time and the times before his own to suit his own purpose. What this purpose was has been the subject of extensive debate, but this thesis has shown that, at every stage, Gregory was concerned with the strengthening of his own position, through bolstering the reputation of his see, through highlighting the importance of orthodoxy as defined by a select company of Catholic bishops – identifiable by their lack of regard for worldly trappings - and through enhancing Gregory's personal reputation as an incorruptible church leader, no respecter of persons, who could steer his followers through the dangerous waters of the earthly life to salvation.

Moreover, this thesis has shown that gender is at every stage the key to a fuller understanding of Gregory's purpose. Several writers have noted, and Martin Heinzelmann in particular has carefully traced, the influence of the Bible on Gregory's work, but gender has thus far fallen through the net. This thesis has redressed the balance, examining key areas in which Gregory has used female characters in a similar way to Biblical writers, to express ideas, and even to personify concepts.

In chapter two, Chlothild appears as a type of Woman Wisdom, allowing Gregory to show Clovis in the act of choosing the correct path, while other kings around him fell by the wayside. In Chapter three, Gregory articulates the battle lines between orthodoxy and heresy through the journeys of individual women, who travelled abroad to marry

foreign princes, and also by showing Arianism to be a religion which failed to control its women, resulting in sexual license and violence. Drawing on Biblical personifications of the apostate nation of Israel as a fallen woman mercilessly and justifiably punished by God, Gregory personifies Arianism as a sexually loose, violent woman who receives her fair comeuppance. This helps to formulate Gregory's argument, reprised in the last two Books of the *DLH*, that Catholicism is pure and inviolate, its borders clearly defined, while Arianism is both diffuse and corrupted. Chapter four of the thesis offered a re-examination of Gregory's traditional villains, Chilperic and Fredegund. This chapter argued that the pairing of the "wicked king and queen" was largely crafted to allow Gregory to define himself, and his stance towards secular power, in the shaky early days of his episcopate. Gregory casts himself as an Old Testament prophet, who will stand up to those who wield temporal authority. I drew attention to the fact that, while Chilperic's character has been given the benefit of various revisionist readings, Fredegund's "wicked queen" image has not been seriously challenged until now. Chapter five sees Gregory draw on the Book of Revelation, as he uses the opportunity of a revolt in a nunnery to conceptualise the Church in her final days. It was shown that the gender of the nuns, as much as their vocation and the fact of their enclosure, was vital to Gregory's purpose.

In each of these chapters, women and gender have been shown to serve more than a literary function. Gregory's interpretation of Clothild's role in her husband's conversion diverts attention away from the possibility that Clovis could have had political motivations. It is Clothild who ties the success of the next generation of Merovingians – Clovis' sons – to respect of St. Martin and the see of Tours. Therefore it is Clothild who

helps Gregory to underscore his own authority by proving that St. Martin will reward those who honour the bishops of Tours. Heresy is a vital issue for Gregory because, as a Catholic bishop, he is one of the chief arbiters of orthodoxy. Chapter three affirmed that Arianism was a living concern for Gregory, and suggested that the reason for this was his anxiety over the wavering orthodoxy of the current king of Tours, Chilperic. As we have seen, Arianism proved incapable of keeping its women under control: moving into Chapter four, Gregory's characterisation of Fredegund as unduly influential and out-of-control in her use of violence was possibly part of his expression of this concern. After Chilperic's death, Fredegund became the lightning-rod for tensions between the young king Childebert and his Uncle Guntram. Gregory, working on Childebert's behalf, encouraged Guntram to identify Fredegund, as the surviving half of the wicked couple, as having been responsible for the discord in the realm. The aim of this was to allow Childebert and Guntram to move forward to peace. Gregory's interventions in Poitiers enhanced the see of Tours, at the same time as the revolt itself helped to affirm his own authority as a leader of God's flock by focusing attention on the need to prepare for the Last Days.

This thesis has important implications for the study of Gregory, offering a fresh perspective on Gregory's stimulus for writing, on the starting point of the *DLH*, and on Gregory's changing and developing concerns as both writer and bishop. More widely, it also has ramifications for the study of gender. Ideals of masculinity were in flux over the course of the sixth century. As the Preface to *DLH* V makes clear, now that the toils of Clovis had established a Gaul with firm and clear boundaries, the only acceptable

violence was in defence of the church. The only place that women had within this scheme was as valiant guardians of their own chastity, with its symbolic implications for the church as a whole. It is evident that wider attitudes towards violence committed or advocated by women were changing over the sixth century. In calling her sons to seek vengeance on her behalf, Clothild was calling on them to prove themselves in war, and to build up a band of followers who would assist them in any internecine power struggles. Clothild's request, it was argued, was directed particularly at Chlodomer, her oldest son. When he was killed, and after the deaths of his sons, of whom she had assumed guardianship, she apparently switched allegiance to Clothar. He was her second oldest son, but the murder of his nephews when his brother Childebert faltered suggested that he was the brother most ready to take on his father's fierce mantle. Interestingly, her weapon was now prayer. Gregory sees fit to cast violence as one of the characteristics of Arian women's foreignness. In so doing, he helps to create and affirm Frankish Christian gender norms. The Christian Franks keep their women under control, the Arian Goths do not. The type of woman who was a suitable partner to the "hyper-masculine", expansionist warrior-king Clovis was clearly not a seemly consort to later kings. Gregory is able to criticise Chilperic's judgment, and perhaps even call his stance on orthodoxy into question, by showing his wife behaving in a similar way to execrable female heretics. Chapter four demonstrated, however, that Fredegund's behaviour was not so different from Clothild's. Understandably, Merovingian wives had different priorities as regards the demands made on them by competing gender norms, than those of the Gallo-Roman Catholic churchmen who watched and judged them. By the beginning of the sixth century's final decade, violence committed by women was unacceptable to the degree

that Gregory was able to present it, in the last two Books of his *DLH*, as apocalyptic. We see the paradigm of femininity changing, then, over a relatively short period of time.

That “gender” as employed by Gregory has so far escaped scholarly attention is of course because such gender norms, particularly those we find in the Bible, are still very much a part of our own culture. Soldiers in World War II were still called to fight for “Mother and Country”, rape is still used in war as a symbol of conquest (in both cases, the individual female body represents the land) and women are still, in east and west, brought up to regard themselves as both the gateways and gatekeepers of sin, responsible for the control of male lust through appropriate dress and behaviour. By unpicking the gender norms of late sixth-century Gaul, this thesis helps to undermine the assumptions that continue to limit us.

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