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## GREGORY OF TOURS' POETICS

Peter Phillip Jones\*

**Abstract:** This article uncovers some of the intricate story-telling patterns in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours (ca. 538–594 CE). In *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Meir Sternberg outlines a method of interpretation useful for approaching a literary artifact whose self-classification is history, identifying three principles operating interdependently within any narrative work: the ideological, the historiographical, and the aesthetic. These principles produce a complex network of linkages which make up the narrative as a mode of communication. Using Sternberg's model as an instrument of interpretation, this analysis identifies narrative devices as functional structures for the *Decem Libri Historiarum*, such as intentional gaps, repetitions, and time manipulations. Gregory's narrative demonstrates a flexible poetics, serving the purposes of history and ideology side-by-side. Narrative devices otherwise functionally at odds with one another (omission vs. repetition) are combined to produce a unitary artistic logic.

**Keywords:** Gregory of Tours, poetics, early medieval history, narrative, historiography, literary criticism, *History of the Franks*, medieval Latin, Merovingian Gaul, *Decem Libri Historiarum*.

### INTRODUCTION: GREGORY OF TOURS, HIS LIFE, HIS WORKS, AND HIS WORLD

We can say of every art work that it is conditioned, in its very nature, by three factors: the time of its origins, the place, and the individuality of the artist.<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Tours' *Histories* is the greatest work of history to come out of the sixth century in Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> It is also indispensable as one of our only sources for Merovingian Gaul.<sup>3</sup> Bishop in Tours from 573 to 594, Gregory was born Georgius Floren-

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Zur Technik der Frürenaissancenovelle in Italien und Frankreich*, PhD Thesis (University of Greifswald 1921) 1; trans. Arthur R. Evans, Jr., "Erich Auerbach as European Critic," *Romance Philology* 25 (1971–1972) 198.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (hereafter *LH*), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum* (hereafter *MGH SRM*) 1.1, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hannover 1969) 1–537. Throughout this essay I primarily refer to the translation by O. M. Dalton, *History of the Franks* (Oxford 1927), but I also make use of the translation by Lewis Thorpe, *History of the Franks* (London 1974), and selections by Ernest Brehaut, *History of the Franks: Selections* (New York 1916), where I feel the Latin is more closely translated.

<sup>3</sup> One other major source is the poet Venantius Fortunatus, who wrote a copious amount of poetry to various aristocratic and ecclesiastical members of his community, including twenty-four poems to Gregory, his close friend. See Venantius Fortunatus, *Poems to Friends* 5.4; 5.8; 5.8a; 5.8b; 5.9; 5.10; 5.11; 5.12; 5.13; 5.14; 5.15; 5.16; 5.17; 8.11; 8.14; 8.15; 8.16; 8.17; 8.18; 8.19; 8.20; 8.21; trans. Joseph Pucci (Indianapolis 2010) 23–42; and see also Venantius Fortunatus, *Personal and Political Poems* 9.6; 9.7; trans. Judith George (Liverpool 1995) 89–95.

tius in 538, the son of an Auvergnese nobleman and Burgundian noblewoman, each with long lines of ecclesiastic ancestors. He wrote ten books of *Histories*, often erroneously referred to as the *History of the Franks*, along with seven books of *Miracula*, one book on the *Life of the Fathers*, as well as a *Commentary on the Psalms* and another on the offices of the Church.<sup>4</sup> The subject matter of the *Histories* is more varied than Gregory's other works, as their details in more-or-less equal measure focus on Merovingian politics and ecclesiastical affairs. The books of *Miracula*, beginning with the *Glory of the Martyrs*, may be said to be more centrally concerned with religious matters, with many words concerning the deeds of the holy, though the *Histories* too are filled with similar episodes. The *Miracula* writings assert more forcefully the active presence of God in Gregory's society, while the *Histories* profess to include "the doings of saints" mixed with the "slaughters of nations" (*virtutes sanctorum ... strages gentium*).<sup>5</sup>

At first sight, Gregory's narrative in the *Histories* appears discontinuous, haphazard, and careless in its organization and relation of complex subject matter. He was concerned with matters great and small, from the wars of the Merovingian nobility to the feuds of local

<sup>4</sup> *The History of the Franks* was actually the title attached to a ninth-century manuscript containing an abridgement of Gregory's *Histories* from ten to six books, edited anonymously in the seventh century. See Walter Goffart, "From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours," *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and John Contreni (Kalamazoo 1987) 55–76; also see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton 1988) 125; and Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge 2001) 2. Of his commentary on the Psalms, only a few fragments survive. See *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis in psalterii tractatum commentarius*, in MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.2, 423–427. His work on the offices of the church has maintained to the present the title *De cursu stellarum ratio*, derived from an eighth-century manuscript: MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.2, 404–422; see Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton 1993) 50 n. 2. Gregory also wrote a preface for a collection of liturgical masses by Sidonius Apollinaris, a translation of an account of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a group of legendary martyrs, and a book on the miracles of Saint Andrew. In Book 2 of the *Histories*, Gregory mentions the otherwise lost preface to the masses of Sidonius: Gregory, *LH* 2.22; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 67, "I have described this in more detail in the preface of the book which I wrote about the Masses composed by that man [Sidonius]" ("*Quod in praefatione libri, quem de missis ab eo compositis coniunximus, plenius declaravimus*"); Thorpe (n. 2 above) 134. For the seven sleepers, see Gregory, MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.2, 396–403. For the miracles of St. Andrew, see Gregory, MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.2, 371–395.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.1; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 37–38; Brehaut (n. 2 above) 21. Brehaut's translation of *gentium* as "nations" certainly gives the phrase World War I-era colouring, where "slaughters of peoples" or "slaughters of clans" would seem to be closer fits with Gregory's Latin.

folk. But Gregory also chose to include in his texts a wide variety of what seem to be casual details about everyday life in his society, the meaning of which is often left implicit. A brief example comes from Book 8 in the *Histories*, in which an astronomical phenomenon is witnessed: "At this time," observes Gregory, "there appeared signs, fiery rays in the northern sky, such as frequently appear. A brilliant light was seen to cross the heavens, and flowers blossomed upon the trees. It was the fifth month of the year."<sup>6</sup> Efforts to connect this working of the heavens to episodes prior (the humiliation of Bishop Palladius by King Chilperic) or following (Chilperic's acknowledgement of a bastard son) are frustrated, as these specific signs are not discussed again. Moreover, they seem insignificant in regard to saintly deeds and national slaughters.

Although Gregory does orient much of his *Histories* around the actions of the Merovingians and of various ecclesiastics, he is certainly not strictly bound by these themes. He offers up the minutiae of his surroundings as he simultaneously reproduces his own experiences, in a carefully constructed narrative that challenges the reader. Following a generally chronological scheme, Gregory sets obstacles in the way of the reader's comprehension, including leaps in time, narrative gaps and intentional repetitions. The function behind these devices is never obvious, but must be pieced together through careful, context-specific interpretation. Together, they work to shape Gregory's history into a narrative both richly imbued with ideological motivations and committed to accurate depiction. Episodes which neither relate to the affairs of the Merovingians nor the doings of bishops and other ecclesiastics suggest that Gregory sought to reflect, in both content and form, his own experience of the sixth century as fully as possible.

As a moral writer, Gregory was partaking in a discourse which first flourished in the fifth century, with writers such as Salvian and Orientius.<sup>7</sup> Other sources that influenced Gregory include Paulus Orosius's *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (*Historiae Adversus Paganos*), and Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia Ecclesiastica*). Ian Wood has attempted to show that modern perceptions of a decline in Western European written culture during the fifth century may be the result of a failure to appreciate the purposes with which early medieval

<sup>6</sup> Gregory, *LH* 8.8; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 376, "Tunc apparuerunt signa, id est radii a parte aquilonis, sicut saepius apparere solent. Fulgor per caelum cucurrisse visus est, floresque in arboribus ostensi sunt. Erat enim mensis quintus"; Dalton 2 (n. 2 above) 334.

<sup>7</sup> Orientius, *Commonitorium*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Eccl. Latinorum* 16, ed. Robinson Ellis (Vienna 1888): "Poetae Christiani minores" I 191–261. Salvian, *De Gubernatione Dei*, ed. and trans. Georges Lagarrigue, *Sources Chrétiennes* 220 (Paris 1975).

writers wrote, many of whom were moralists.<sup>8</sup> Gregory's literary inheritance provides us with possible discursive precedents for his *Histories*. But while Gregory explicitly mentions Orosius, Eusebius, and Jerome, each of their texts was produced in a very different context from his own.<sup>9</sup>

Gregory's is a very dramatic style of narration, and has been described as a kind of scenic representation.<sup>10</sup> But it has also received scathing criticism for its poorly constructed Latin. In his pioneering reading of Gregory, the philologist Erich Auerbach is reminded of a conversational style of Latin, but as opposed to the carefully constructed dialogues of Roman antiquity, Gregory's narrative lacks proper syntactical organization.<sup>11</sup> He is apparently unable to causally connect his various clauses, opting instead for simple, but also often confused parataxis. Auerbach sees in this style the vulgarization of Latin, a snapshot of the language in its slow transition into the vernacular.<sup>12</sup> Others, like Jennifer Roberts, have argued that his style is actually more reminiscent of an archaic style of Latin which is occasionally employed in the writings of Ennius and Livy. This was a more human language, designed to capture the vividness of lived experience.<sup>13</sup> Despite an admission that Gregory's is a less rigorously organized Latin than his Roman forebears, this investigation argues for a conscious and intentional Gregory, who uses language for meaningful communication,

<sup>8</sup> Ian N. Wood, "Continuity of Calamity?: The Constraints of Literary Models," *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (Cambridge 1992) 9–18.

<sup>9</sup> It is not within the scope of this study to compare the works Orosius, Eusebius, and Jerome with the *Histories*.

<sup>10</sup> Joaquín M. Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene: Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto 1989) 13, "I am talking fundamentally about the decision on the part of the narrator to let the story speak for itself, that is, to efface himself as much as possible and create the illusion that we are witnessing the events he describes." Pizarro builds on Erich Auerbach's interpretation of Gregory's style in the episode of the *Histories* relating a feud between Sichar and Chrammesind, considered below.

<sup>11</sup> Auerbach writes, "[Gregory] has neither the energy to dispose [his ideas] in a single construction through the aid of a system of dependent clauses, nor the foresight to recognize the difficulty and get around it by a synoptic introductory statement." See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton 1953) 82.

<sup>12</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis* (n. 11 above) 94.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer T. Roberts, "Gregory of Tours and the Monk of St. Gall: the Paratactic Style of Medieval Latin," *Latomus* 39 (1980) 179: "Gregory does not so much represent a decline from classical Latin as he does a reversion to the style of an earlier era when Latin had not yet reached the consummation of its rational, ordering nature with the attendant replacement of immediacy with formality; in him we may witness the return of an abortive spontaneity which had given way before the rigors of syntactic expression—before the dehumanizing demands of linguistic technology."

rather than a confused chronicler who struggles to reproduce his reality through literature.

#### METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

The objective of this article is to uncover some of the complex network of linkages that constitute Gregory of Tours' *Histories*. Adopting Meir Sternberg's interpretive model, I consider Gregory's historical narrative as a functional structure, formed through a series of literary devices that represent strategies designed to produce a certain effect, namely to bring the reader's viewpoint into closer alignment with Gregory's own worldview through subtle persuasion. Important within this model is Sternberg's outline of three fundamental elements that operate within any work of historical literature: the historiographical, the ideological, and the aesthetic. These three principles interrelate to shape the narrative:

They join forces to originate a strategy of telling that casts reading as a drama, interpretation as an ordeal that enacts and distinguishes the human predicament ... The three regulating principles merge into a single poetics, where their interests and formations so coalesce that they can hardly be told apart in the finished message.<sup>14</sup>

The three foundations of the "drama of reading" are recognized by their recurring features. For the Bible, Sternberg points to monotheism, the suppression of myth, the rise of ethics and personal responsibility as prevalent ideological markers within the narrative.<sup>15</sup> Sternberg also identifies the convention of omniscience as embodying the ideology of biblical discourse. This manifests within the structure of the narrative itself, and affects historiographical and aesthetic considerations. Omniscience constitutes an overarching principle in the Bible, which is present to varying degrees that reflect the play of perspectives, or what Sternberg calls a "manoeuvring between the truth and the whole truth."<sup>16</sup> The gaps left in the sequence of the narrative, a terseness characteristic in biblical narrative, communicates the cognitive antithesis between God and human, complete versus partial knowledge. This feature challenges the reader to fill in the gaps through inference, limiting what can be known directly and in doing so, teaching the essential limitations of humanity. The discourse itself mirrors the human experi-

<sup>14</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington 1985) 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 46. As will be seen, these features also recur throughout the *Histories*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

ence.<sup>17</sup> I argue that Gregory uses a functional organization similar to that of the biblical narrator, constructing a narrative which can only be fully grasped through careful inference, often reflecting Gregory's own limited perspective.

Also essential to my adopted method of narrative deconstruction is Sternberg's concept of "foolproof composition." This constructive process, which Sternberg identifies as thoroughly typical of biblical narrative, sets as a first priority a minimum of consensus regarding the essential aspects of the narrative: for the Bible, these are the story line, the world order, and the value system. None of these aspects is ever accidental or self-evident in the Bible, but can only be identified through carefully contextualized interpretation.<sup>18</sup> An important part of this interpretation rests on an understanding of the internal premises established by the discourse. Preceding any in-depth analysis, one of the premises that apply to both biblical narrative and Gregory's historical narrative is a truth premise, or truth claim, at the least. This premise confronts a constant tension within any work of literature, and which is crucial to any attempt at understanding the historiography of the early middle ages: the tension between history and fiction. Sternberg's methodology operates under the assumption that the key distinguishing concept between history and fiction, between "world and word," is the difference between truth claim and the license of fiction. History offers itself to the reader under the rubric of truth-claim, and even when of poor quality, a work written as history remains history, it does not become fiction when it is revealed to contain errors or fictional elements.<sup>19</sup> In consideration of the *Histories*, I operate under the same assumption. Whatever Gregory's omissions and suppressions and the fictional passages he invents for various purposes, his work is history. What remains to be determined are the restrictions Gregory placed on himself as a faithful historian.

The value of Sternberg's poetics of biblical narrative is its ability to subtly shift the interpretive frame closer to the text itself. A deconstruction of this text using Sternberg's interpretive model as a heuristic tool invariably yields greater insight into the time and place in which the work was produced, if only through the narrow lens of a single bishop. A potentially dangerous presupposition of this inquiry is that since Sternberg's interpretive model was formed specifically for interpreting the Bible, it will do violence to a text for which it was not intended. Against such dangers I can merely express my confidence in this

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 25.

particular interpretive model based on my own ontological assumptions: 1) that any history represents on a fundamental level the tension between experience and time, the desire to give human experience meaning within time through the instrument of language; and 2) that any use of language in this way is always only one use among many, and while complete recovery of the past is impossible, multiple uses of language to describe or somehow recover that past (alias: narrative) each help to give a sense of the past. Within these assumptions, this study represents an attempt at a new narrative for Gregory as a thoughtful historian, one I hope is more sensitive to the remains he has left us.

#### DISCOVERING GREGORY'S LOGIC OF GAPS

Any narrative represents a process of selection, a countless number of choices. Every choice is simultaneously a selection and an omission; what is said against everything else that might have been said in its place. These authorial choices combine to substantiate a text's own norms and directives, with which the reader labors to construct meaning. We begin our investigation of Gregory's poetics with an examination of his reticence and omissions, questioning his narrative choices and their implications for the meaning of the whole. O. M. Dalton, in his commentary on the *Histories*, criticizes Gregory for his lack of "pictorial" detail in describing characters, places, and objects in his episodes.<sup>20</sup> Walter Goffart also draws attention to Gregory's omissions, taking as one example Gregory's silence regarding Parthenius, a grandson of the emperor Avitus, and a well-known official in Gaul during Gregory's lifetime.<sup>21</sup> He is mentioned as a lynched tax official, whose only other details include the unjustified murder of his wife and her lover.<sup>22</sup> Goffart sees this type of reticence as emblematic of a pervasive obstacle to any understanding of Gregory's episodes, that "except for royalty, the actors come abruptly before us without origins or a social context."<sup>23</sup> This astute observation also applies to the episodes describing the feud between Sichar and Chramnesind, the object of Erich Auerbach's original interpretation regarding Gregory's literary competence.

#### GREGORY'S RETICENCE AND OMISSIONS: SICCHAR AND CHRAMNESIND

Gregory narrates for us, occasionally stepping in to play a part. His style has been censured for its naïveté and praised for its honesty, offer-

<sup>20</sup> Dalton 1 (n. 2 above) 25–27.

<sup>21</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 161.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory, *LH* 3.36; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 131–132; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 191–192.

<sup>23</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 161.

ing up the events of Merovingian Gaul in simple parataxis. In the Sichar and Chramnesind episodes, the experience of the historical event is communicated through the narrator's reticence and omissions. These gaps and their implications can be easily passed over by the reader, in favor of the more readily apparent qualities of Gregory's writing: the strong moral overtones in detailing "the doings of saints," and the "slaughters of nations" throughout, to which almost every examiner of Gregory has drawn attention. While this moralistic, or ideological, quality appears to be the dominant aesthetic principle governing the narrative, it is nevertheless illuminating to examine the ways in which Gregory also serves the purpose of the historian, producing dramatic narrative that recounts the past, and reinforces Christian ideology both explicitly and implicitly. In the two episodes considered here, Gregory's narrative re-creates his own experience in struggling to arrive at the truth.

In Book 7.47 of the *Histories*, Gregory details an ongoing feud (*gravia bella civilia*; lit. "grave civil wars") between some people (*cives*) of Tours. But the feud is not in Tours. At least, it is not there initially. The initial setting is the village of Manthelan, and the initial character is Sichar, who, together with another, Austregesil, enjoys Christmas festivities with a number of other local folk (*reliquosque pagenses*).<sup>24</sup> The village priest—presumably the priest of Manthelan—ordered one of his servants to invite some of the men to come and have a drink in his house. With the arrival of the servant (*puero*) to invite this group of men, one of the men struck the servant and killed him. Already at this point, confusion abounds, not least of which regarding the reason for the sudden violence. Why are we told the names of Sichar and Austregesil before the violence done to the servant, unless these two named characters are involved? And if they are involved in the violence, why are they not named in relation to it? Are we to assume that this group of men is made up of townsfolk from Tours? These are only a few of the questions the reader might ask at this point in the narrative. The narrator withholds answering anything in an explicit way, making no judgment until the close of the second episode two books later, opting instead to leave subtle hints over which the reader may agonize.

Following the death of the servant boy (*puer*) by the unnamed "one of those who were invited" (*unus ex his qui invitabantur*), Sichar is mentioned as a friend of the priest. Having heard of the servant's death, Sichar grabs weapons and goes to the church to await (*opperiens*)

<sup>24</sup> Manthelan is a town about 30 km south of Tours.

Austregesil.<sup>25</sup> The reader is left to guess to which church he goes, why the church is a necessary location for a meeting, why it is he is going to meet Austregesil specifically, and how he knows to await him there. A safe assumption is that Austregesil was the one responsible for killing the servant, though he is never explicitly named as the killer. In any event, Gregory next informs that Austregesil hears of Sichar's movements and does likewise, grabbing his weapon and heading to the church to move against him (lit. steer towards: *contra eum diregit*). A fight ensues; Sichar is pulled out, and flees, seeking refuge in his country estate. With Sichar gone, Austregesil attacked (*iterum intruens*) at the house of the priest, curiously where Sichar's servants and a number of his possessions remained. We might presume to think that in his haste, Sichar abandoned his effects and his servants, some of whom had been wounded in the fight.<sup>26</sup> But here again, details are sparse. The language is suggestive, and Austregesil violently rushing into a priest's house—a priest whose friendly invitation for drinks began the episode—must meet with the narrator's (and presumably reader's) disapproval. Austregesil makes good his onrush, killing Sichar's servants and plundering his silver and gold. The two parties meet before a judicial assembly (*iudicio*). Austregesil is found guilty for the murder of Sichar's servants and the removal of his goods.<sup>27</sup>

At this point in the story, the picture one may construct from the bits we are told seems fairly straightforward, if fast-paced and brief. The reader feels fairly secure in discerning the two war parties, and the cause of the dispute. However, it is significant that at the judgment of Austregesil, only he is named, with Sichar's presence only implied. The narrator may be reticent to name Sichar, for reasons not given. This is the first of a few such omissions where the reader is left to speculate on the available evidence. As becomes clear by the end of these two episodes, these omissions help to align the reader and the narrator in terms of knowledge and expectation. But for now, if we proceed to the next attempt in the episode at judicial settlement, we see the narrator surface as a historical actor. Gregory becomes directly involved in the affair, and can be seen seeking to mediate amidst implications of conflicting opinion.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 366, "Quod cum Sicharius audisset, qui amicitias cum presbitero retinebat, quod scilicet puer eius fuerit interfectus, arrepta arma ad ecclesiam petit, Austrighyselum opperiens."

<sup>26</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 366, "[R]elictis in domo presbiteri cum argento et vestimentis quattuor pueris sauciatis."

<sup>27</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 366, "Dehinc cum in iudicio civium convenissent et praeceptum esset, ut Austrighyselus, qui homicida erat et, interfectis pueris, res sine audientia diripuerat, censura legali condempnaretur."

Immediately following the communal judgement of Austregesil, the narrative turns to Sichar, now named explicitly. He learns that the goods stolen from him rest with three men: Auno, Auno's son, and Auno's brother Eberulf. As to the reason why the stolen items should be in the possession of these three, Guy Halsall has proposed that the judgement placed the stolen property in the temporary possession of Auno as a neutral third party, pending a final decision or formal transaction.<sup>28</sup> Halsall considers this a possible explanation in light of the fact, stated at the end of the second episode, that Sichar was under the protection of Queen Brunhild.<sup>29</sup> Sichar's royal patron may have raised the profile of the dispute, and in turn the caution of the tribunal in dispersing the disputed property. This delay in regaining his assets may have provided Sichar with adequate motivation to take matters into his own hands. Whatever the reason for Auno's possession of the property, there is no hint that Austregesil resists the judgement, and he is never heard from again. At this point the second vital implication for what will become Gregory's attempt at mediation is set before the reader: "Sichar thereupon dismissed the tribunal from his mind as if it had never been, sought the help of a certain Audinus (*coniunctus Audino*) and started an affray (*inruit*) by attacking the three men in the middle of the night with a gang of armed men (*cum armatis viris*)."<sup>30</sup>

In the murderous events against Chramnesind's kinsmen—later on referred to as *patris*, *fratris*, and *patrui*—the reader is likely to assume the direct involvement of Sichar.<sup>31</sup> But the narrator may have side-stepped this assumption. Having joined with Audinus (*coniunctus Audino*), he invaded Auno's house. This is the usual sense made by translations of the *Histories*. But what if the passage is taken rather to indicate that Audinus invaded, and that Sichar merely joined with him in communicating orders, or that Sichar *enjoined* Audinus to undertake the task?<sup>32</sup> Neither of these is beyond reason, whether on linguistic or

<sup>28</sup> Halsall makes this observation in rejecting Wallace-Hadrill's statement that Austregesil and Auno were related, an unsubstantiated conjecture made to suit a theory of the feud based on kinship. See Guy Halsall, "Violence and Society: An Introductory Survey," in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Guy Halsall (Rochester 1998) 24; see also J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "The Bloodfeud of the Franks," *The Long-Haired Kings* (London 1962) 121–147; and Ian Wood, "The Bloodfeud of the Franks: A Historiographical Legend," *Early Medieval Europe* 14.4 (2006) 492–493.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; *MGH SRM* (n. 2 above) 1.1, 434, "[R]egina Brunehildis in verbo suo posuerat Sicharium."

<sup>30</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; *MGH SRM* (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; *MGH SRM* (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "[S]ed pars Chramnesindi, quae mortem patris fratrisque et patrui requirebat, accipere noluit."

<sup>32</sup> See in *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (hereafter *OLD*), s.v., "coniungo," 3: "To join (parties of men) into a single force, unite (forces)"; 5: "To establish communication between, connect (two points or one with another); to be connected"; 7: "To bring into close

narrative grounds. Even the short clause following *coniunctus Audino*, “mota seditione,” need not relate directly to Sichar. For if Audinus will fight to avenge the property and servants of Sichar, it is easily imaginable that he would be moved by the dispute, perhaps at the order of Sichar, but perhaps of his own volition.<sup>33</sup> Whatever his motivation, the language confronting the reader is consistently reticent with regard to Sichar, and culpability can never be more than suspected. The passage detailing the action taken against Auno and his kin is marked by a string of dependent clauses with no clear person in subject position. Sichar is implied as the chief actor in “Sicharius audiens ... postposito placito ... cum armatis viris inruit,” but the construction is far from unambiguous. The overall reticent language that Gregory uses in regard to Sichar permits a fuller appreciation for Chramnesind’s position before the king at the close of the second episode, when he has killed Sichar.

Following the action by Audinus (and possibly Sichar) against Auno and the others, the remainder of the first episode is characterized by two attempts at settlement between the two parties. Immediately after the plunder of Auno’s house, Gregory hears of the affair, and summons (presumably) all involved, in conjunction with a judge (*adiuncto iudice*).<sup>34</sup> Having gathered with a number of supporters (*coniunctisque civibus*), Gregory begs that they make peace, so that God may grant them the kingdom of heaven, for “blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”<sup>35</sup> In reciting a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Gregory presents the reader with bald truth, while simultaneously connecting biblical authority with his own, not only by being himself a peacemaker in the episode, but also by being the trustworthy narrator holding the reader’s hand.<sup>36</sup> Gregory the peacemaker offers money from the Church to pay the fine of the man incapa-

association, unite (by friendship, obligation, kinship, etc.); b: “to bring into alliance; to form an alliance, make common cause”; 8: “To bring about, form (friendships, relationships, etc.)”; 9: “To bring together in speaking or writing; to add, include”; (Oxford 1968) 408–409.

<sup>33</sup> This is possibly the same Audinus whose son was responsible, according to Gregory, for producing a book of tax assessments for the people of Tours, who had enjoyed abeyance from such assessments in the past. This person received a curse from Gregory, subsequently took a fever and died three days later. See Gregory, *LH* 9.30; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 515–517.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, “[Q]ui digni sitis regno Dei, ipso Domino tribuente, percipere. Sic enim ipse ait: Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion of Gregory as peacekeeper, see Edward James, “*Beati pacifici*: Bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul,” *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West*, ed. John Bossy (London 1983) 25–45.

ble of paying, so that his soul may not perish in the meantime (*interim anima viri non pereat*). Chramnesind's party (*pars Chramnesindi*) refused the monetary assistance, and departed. There is no mention of Sichar's response to Gregory's offer, or any payment on his part towards Chramnesind.

The second attempt at settlement closes the first episode. With Chramnesind and his followers departing, the narrative once again considers Sichar, now making a journey to the king, stopped along the way to see his wife in Poitiers.<sup>37</sup> There he is wounded by a slave, who is soon caught, maimed and executed. Meanwhile the news reached Tours that Sichar was dead (*defunctum*). What happens next is basically a repetition of the previous raid by Audinus on the house of Auno. But this time the offender is Chramnesind, who, gathering friends and relatives (*comminitis parentibus et amicis*), plundered Sichar's house, killed his servants, burned his house, and the houses of his neighbors, and stole any moveable objects.<sup>38</sup> Once again the feuding parties were summoned for judgement. Here it was decided that "Chramnesind, who had refused to accept the compensation offered and had then proceeded to burn down the houses, should forfeit half of the sum previously awarded to him."<sup>39</sup> Thorpe's translation is more informative than Gregory, who neglects to name Chramnesind specifically here. A further decision concerned Sichar, named for the first time in relation to a settlement. He was to pay the other half of the indemnity. But he does not pay it, as Gregory is quick to include that the money came from the church.<sup>40</sup> Chramnesind's judgement, though lacking the specification of his actual name, is specific in detailing the crimes committed and the appropriate punishment. And Gregory stipulates that Chramnesind's punishment was contrary to the law (*hoc contra legis actum*), suggesting that he deserved harsher treatment. Meanwhile, Sichar effectively pays no compensation, though presumably Gregory is referring to the compensation owed to Chramnesind for the murder of Auno and his family; this is nowhere explicit. The narrator's continued reticence con-

<sup>37</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "His discedentibus, Sicharius iter, ut ad regem ambularet praeparat, et ob hoc Pectavum ad uxorem cernendam proficiscitur"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "Quibus spoliatis, interemptis nonnullis servorum, domus omnes tam Sichari quam reliquorum, qui participes huius villae erant, incendio concremavit, abducens secum pecora vel quaecumque movere potuit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367–368, "[Q]ui nollens accepere prius compositionem domus incendiis tradedit, medietatem praetii, quod ei fuerat iudicatum, amitteret..."; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 368, "Tunc datum ab aecclesia argentum"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

cerning Sichar is not explained until the second episode involving these parties, two books later. It is at the close of the episode in Book 9 that the reader is shown Gregory's overriding purpose.

The second episode of the feud, found in Book 9.19, details events that may have taken place as many as three years later. The episode immediately prior to 9.19 describes the Bretons invasion of the Nantes region, sometime in 587. In 9.20, Gregory begins with "In the thirteenth year of Childebert's reign," around 588. The first episode of the feud, in 7.47, ends the seventh book, and the eighth book begins with the twenty-fourth year of Guntram's reign, or 585, thus giving as long as three years between the first and second parts of the feud.<sup>41</sup> The episode opens with strange circumstances: Sichar has formed a great friendship with Chramnesind (*magnam cum eo amicitiam patravisset*), and the two share meals and even a bed. One night Chramnesind invites Sichar to join him for dinner. Sichar becomes drunk on wine (*crapulatus a vino*), and boasts to Chramnesind. It is significant that here the reader is presented with direct speech. In Book 7, the only direct speaker was Gregory himself, in his attempt to mediate the conflict. Here in Book 9, Sichar says:

Dear brother, you ought to be grateful to me for having killed off your relations (*parentes tuos*). There is plenty of gold and silver in your house now that I have recompensed you for what I did to them. If it weren't for the fact that the fine which I've paid has restored your finances, you would still today be poor and destitute.<sup>42</sup>

Though the reader has not yet been made aware of how Gregory is able to relate this speech, it works to set the scene in which the concluding drama and the key revelation of the episode will soon take place. This direct discourse is immediately followed by Chramnesind's response. With Chramnesind feeling sick at heart (*amaro ... animo*), the reader is taken inside Chramnesind's mind (*in corde suo*), where he said (i.e., thought silently): "If I don't avenge my relatives they will say that I am as weak as a woman, for I no longer have the right to be called a

<sup>41</sup> For discussion of this issue, see Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 125 n. 56. Richard Landes estimates about five years passed between the two episodes. See Richard Landes, "Studies in Honor-Shame: Sichar and Chramnesind in the late 6th century," an excerpt from his forthcoming (provisionally titled) *A Medievalist's Guide to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*: see <<http://www.theageanstable.com/2009/06/03/studies-in-honor-shame-sichar-and-chramnesind-in-the-late-6th-century/>>.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, "Magnas mihi debes referre grates, o dulcissime frater, eo quod interfecerim parentes tuos, de quibus accepts compositione, aurum argentumque superabundat in domum tuam, et nudus nunc essis et egens, nisi haec te causa paululum roborassit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 501.

man!”<sup>43</sup> Again, the reader wonders how Gregory could possibly have this information. But this interior speech must be understood simply as a justification for Chramnesind’s imminent violence against Sichar. By the close of the episode, the implication is that Gregory learned of this justification through Chramnesind himself, or second-hand from one who was present at Chramnesind’s eventual audience before King Childebert. Understanding the obscure details of this scene depends on Chramnesind’s confession and self-justification before the king, acting as head of a court of high justice.

Immediately after deliberating in his head, Chramnesind put out the lights in the room (*extinctis luminaribus*) and split Sichar’s skull.<sup>44</sup> With Sichar dead, Chramnesind strips his body and hangs it on Sichar’s fence. He then travels to the king to beseech his mercy for the crime. The king orders him to prove that he had taken life in order to avenge an affront, and this he did. At this point the reader is given the key to this whole historiographical puzzle, the piece that reveals the truth both in Gregory’s vague and ambiguous language and omissions to this point, and a more general truth applicable to all of his histories. “Mighty King!” he said, “I come to plead for my life. I have killed the man who in secret (*clam*) destroyed my relations and then stole all their possessions.”<sup>45</sup> This is an explicit revelation of Sichar’s character, one which has been implicit up until this point. Though he is named as having been involved in the feud from the beginning, the reader can at this point look back and see that Sichar is characterized either as victim, or at most as suspected of being an aggressor. The discovery for the reader is meant to re-create the narrator’s own discovery. Gregory does not offer a straightforward history, but one that reflects the process of deliberation by which he himself came to understand the truth of the matter, the key piece of information being Sichar’s confirmed identity. Both Gregory and the reader have long suspected Sichar, and only here do both arrive at the truth.

Chramnesind returns to the king, and the king demands “that he [Chramnesind] must prove that he had taken life in order to avenge an

<sup>43</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, “Nisi ulciscar interitum parentum meorum, amittere nomen viri debeo et mulier infirma vocare”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 501.

<sup>44</sup> The *Pactus Legis Salica* has a number of clauses that stipulate fines based on the amount of skull or brain exposed as the result of a blow. See Katherine Drew, *The Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia 1991) s.v., “XVII: Concerning Wounds,” 27.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, “Vitam peto, o gloriose rex, eo quod occiderim homines, qui, parentes meus clam interfectis, res omnes diripuerunt”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 502.

affront, and this he did."<sup>46</sup> It is nowhere stated how Chramnesind managed this proof.<sup>47</sup> This may be Gregory lacking the relevant information to offer the reader a full account of the proof of innocence, or perhaps the justification that took place inside of Chramnesind's head was adequate, if not for the king, at least for the purpose of Gregory's narrative. If Gregory was aware of how Chramnesind cleared himself, then he might have deliberately hidden this from the reader to underscore two things: the nature of the feud and its lesson. The feud's duration, reflected in the separation of the two episodes from Book 7 to Book 9, highlights for all involved—the reader in reading time, the characters in the story in historical time—the difficulties of history, and the limitations of human knowledge. He is reticent on the seemingly vital point of the proof of Chramnesind's justification in killing Sichar because it would detract from the more important lesson, and in approaching the end of the account of Sichar and Chramnesind, Gregory seeks to drive home the lesson, wasting no energy on what now seems to him to be trivial detail.

The lesson of the episodes was to show the consequences of rejected or failed mediation. The two settlements that are attempted, the first with Chramnesind rejecting the indemnity offered by Gregory himself, the second with the settlement being paid for both parties by the church (*datum ad aeclesia argentum*), are shown in the conclusion to have utterly failed. In the second settlement, although the two parties come to peace, the conditions of the outcome may say more than the outcome itself, for again the indemnity is given out by the church. The end in Book 9 shows that the culpable parties remained culpable, not having really repented, and certainly not having financially paid for their crimes. Gregory's confidence that the feud was ended (*Et sic altercatio terminum fecit*) is revealed to have been misplaced. This revelation sets the narrator and reader side-by-side, and the narrative up to the conclusion can now be understood as a process of hopeful, yet careful scrutiny, and cautious discovery. The narrator's reticence reflects the limitations of Gregory's own knowledge. The second episode serves to reveal his blindness in interpreting earlier events, but also that this was only partial blindness, as the signs were there, if only as rumors. Gregory recreates his own process of discovery through the omissions in his narrative. The ambiguity created from the omitted details serves Gregory's two

<sup>46</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, "Chramisindus vero iterum ad regem abiit, iudicatumque est ei, ut convinceret super se eum interfecisse. Quod ita fecit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 502.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Book 5.49, where Gregory clears himself of charges of slander against Queen Fredegund by saying Mass at three different altars. See Gregory, *LH* 5.49; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 258–263; Dalton (n. 2 above) 223–5.

purposes: to promote his own ideology, and to record history. In correlation to Gregory's speech concerning the blessed peacemakers, Sichar, revealed to be the culprit of immense sin, pays the ultimate price, while the sinful but justified actions of Chramnesind are tolerable, given Chramnesind's own efforts at repentance.

The episodes themselves reflect the difficulties in acquiring what we might consider a full account. The rejection and failure of the mediation of the two parties, not on the part of the church, which explicitly makes every effort to settle the feud, but on the part of the guilty parties, leads to further bloodshed. The only successful mediation is the one which closes the episode, but also the least meaningful, signified by Gregory's disinterest in its finer details. Had the guilty parties submitted themselves to the mediation of the church, to the *beati pacifici*, death and hardship would have been avoided. A description of Sichar's wife and Sichar's character helps to close the episode, the feud having been ended in Sichar's death: his wife abandons their children and property to live with her own relatives in Pont-sur-Seine, where she remarries.<sup>48</sup> Sichar was only twenty years old, "a loose-living young man, drunken and murderous, causing trouble to all sorts of people when he was in liquor."<sup>49</sup> Bad things happen to bad people, and Gregory has highlighted in these episodes just how difficult it can be to identify the greater of two evils. The narrator retroactively inserted Sichar's name from the outset to tell the reader the identity of the chief suspect, and then the reader is invited to follow the obstacle-laden path towards the truth.

#### UNCOVERING GREGORY'S STRUCTURE OF REPETITION

Repetition constitutes the antithesis to reticence, the opening object of our inquiry into Gregory's poetics. Where reticence opens gaps in the narrative, repetition replaces them, luring the reader toward predictable ends if read straightforwardly and appreciated simply as formulaic reproduction. Information can recur on various levels within the discourse, from verbatim repetition of individual sound units to similarity patterns across two or more plot strands, or the generic re-creation of an event as exemplum, something of which Gregory is particularly fond. Adriaan Breukelaar highlights the theme of the *Histories* as the relationship between good and evil, the moral edification of humanity

<sup>48</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, "Tranquilla quoque, coniux Sichari, relictis filiis et rebus viri sui in Toronico sive in Pectavo, ad parentes suos Mauriopes vicum expetiit; ibique et matrimonio copulata est"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 502.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, "Fuit autem in vita sua levis, ebriosus, homicida, qui nonnullis per ebrietatem iniuriam intulit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 502.

in the face of constant evil, and repetition is how Gregory accomplishes this theme, "Not by reasoning or arguments, but by innumerable demonstrations he teaches his lessons."<sup>50</sup> Much has been made of Gregory's use of repetition in his writing, and the *Histories* demonstrate his recourse to this device on a number of occasions. Bishops and saints again and again are seen championing the church, the poor, or whomever in peril, illness or poverty, while others, most notably those of the Merovingian nobility, steep themselves in every conceivable kind of sin.

Similar to Breukelaar, in his discussion of Gregory as satirist, Walter Goffart has argued for the repetition of Gregory's "Christian bluntness" to be measured against the *philosophans rethor* of classical antiquity, as two competing modes of moral edification:

Christian salvation perceived as empirical fact allowed a historian to speak in the accents of a satirist and yet to retain his composure and calm. The world was and, since the Fall, had always been in the grip of fools and criminals, but some men went to heaven.<sup>51</sup>

Goffart also mentions in his discussion the overwhelming repetition of virtue in Gregory's *Miracula* writings, predictably most visible in the working of the miraculous. In contrast to this assessment, Breukelaar has quantified the episodes of the *Histories* in the terms of "good and bad things," noting that the "bad" far outweigh the "good" in sum.<sup>52</sup> From these two studies, among many others, the theme of "miracles and slaughters" that Gregory identifies in the preface to Book 2 is well acknowledged, and certainly seems the locus of ultimate meaning for Gregory in relating the experience of his times. However, the ways in which he maneuvers the language of his narrative alongside this pervasive theme to accomplish both historiographical and ideological ends, remain to be examined in detail. In the following section, an attempt is made to pin down a structural logic motivating Gregory's use of repetition in the *Histories*.

#### VARIABLE AND EQUIVALENT REPETITIONS: MIRACLES AND SLAUGHTERS

The miracles and slaughters put forward by Gregory in the preface to the second book are a striking feature in the *Histories*, and have re-

<sup>50</sup> Adriaan Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul: The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in Their Historical Context* (Göttingen 1994) 269.

<sup>51</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 203.

<sup>52</sup> Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority* (n. 49 above) 270.

ceived their fair share of scholarly attention. As distinct topics of a history, for Gregory they certainly occupy poles on a moral spectrum, and indicate his active adherence to an ideology centered on notions of damnation and salvation determined by the presence or absence of sinful transgression. But within specific instances of slaughtering or miraculous action there may be more going on than mere mechanical reproduction for the sake of bolstering ideology. More than adding beans on a counter, Gregory carefully builds repetition into his narrative as signposts to guide the reading operation.

If we look once more to our paradigmatic example of *Sichar* and *Chramnesind* to help situate repetition alongside reticence and omissions, however integrated into the finished product, it is possible to observe repetition operating with force equal to the reticence of Gregory's episcopal sleuthing, and as will be seen, to the time manipulations by which he himself plays upon the reader's suspense and expectations in relating events. The narrative that is constructed from the interplay of these three devices is a balanced, considered and yet demanding product for the reader. Repetition itself may serve as both an aid and an obstacle to the comprehension of the text, and of the narrator's true purpose.

With *Sichar* and *Chramnesind*, the play of the plot is striking in its rhythmic movement from violence to settlement, to renewed violence and further mediation, until its finale in Book 9, where *Chramnesind*'s climactic action is both extreme violence and successful, if tragic, mediation. The repetitions of violence and settlement do not necessarily stand out to the reader as narrative devices, meant to steer the reader one way or another, and may on the surface of the narrative be accepted outright for their mimetic value. But as one example, mentioned earlier in the discussion of reticence and omissions, Gregory's subtle glossing over of *Chramnesind*'s justification for the murder of *Sichar* at the end of Book 9 suggests that he intended the emphasis to be on the repeated, failed mediations that led to such an unfortunate but definitive conclusion, less so on the conclusion itself.<sup>53</sup> Put more simply, for Gregory, in this case it is the means, not the end, to which one is meant to pay attention, and repetition marks out those means to the careful observer. The pitfalls of historiography and of sin run side-by-side.

Gregory's repetitions are not limited to the movements within and across episodes and books. Repetitions in the movement of the plot may be reinforced as guiding principles by the repetition of familiar

<sup>53</sup> Recall n. 76 above: Gregory, *LH* 9.19; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 433, "Chramisindus vero iterum ad regem abiit, iudicatumque est ei, ut convinceret super se eum interfecisse. Quod ita fecit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 502.

phrasing, which helps to align the characters along Gregory's ideological axis within the narrative. The repetition of mediation draws out similarity and dissimilarity to sharpen Gregory's message. In terms of similarity, the Church, with Gregory stepping forward as representative in this case, first exhorting the quarrelling parties and then offering to recompense with the strikingly similar alliterative phrasing, "argento aeclesiae redemitur," "optuli argentum aeclesiae," and, "tunc datum ab aeclesia argentum," speaks to the plausibility of intentional repetition to point the reader toward a discoverable, but in no way obvious, truth in the text.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to repeated patterns in the language and plot identifiable by way of alliteration, dissimilarity emerges from the episodes' cast of characters along the ideological axis. Also significant, and borne out through contrast, is Gregory's voice as the only one we hear speaking for the Church during these two episodes. In histories that elsewhere contain the regular interactions between many members of the ecclesiastical community with the laity, that Gregory alone is seen and heard suing for peace may be more than coincidence.<sup>55</sup> The Church, the solitary authority in an eternal quest for moral edification, is a unified force amid the denizens of vice. On the other hand, in terms of dissimilarity, the slaughters that demand mediation are presented with a motley cast of characters, each new one adding variance to the next bout of violence.

For each repetition of mediation, a structural formula stands out to further set the reader on the proper interpretive path. Gregory repeatedly offers money in a nearly equivalent set of words, this matching the near equivalence of the crimes committed—in object, if not in language: *x* rushes in, kills *y*'s servants, plunders *y*'s goods and/or destroys *y*'s property.<sup>56</sup> A further equivalence is identifiable between the charges

<sup>54</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429.

<sup>55</sup> For instance, the drama that unfolds in Book 8.43, where a servant of Guntram, Antestius, is seen harrassing Bishop Nonnichius of Nantes. The narrative then jumps to Palladius, Bishop of Saintes, who is waylaid by Antestius en route to his church. See Gregory, *LH* 8.43; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 409–410; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 474–475.

<sup>56</sup> Austregesil attacks the priest's home: Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 366, "Quo fugiente, Austrighyselus iterum inruens, interfectis pueris, aurum argentumque cum reliquis rebus abstulit"; Thorpe, (n. 2 above) 428. Sichar, joined with Audinus, attacks the kin of Chramnesind: Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "[C]um armatis viris inruit super eos nocte, elisumque hospicium, in quo dormiebant, patrem cum frater et filio interemit resque eorum cum pecoribus, interfectisque servis, abduxit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429. Chramnesind attacks the home of Sichar: Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "Quibus spoliatis, interemptis nonnullis servorum, domus omnes tam Sichari quam reliquorum, qui participes huius villae erant, incendio concremavit, abducens secum pecora vel quaecumque movere potuit"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

laid on the accused at the *iudicia* and the description of the criminal acts themselves. While reflective of legal language in use during the time, the repetition of phrases such as “interfectis pueris,” from the context of nonverbal action (Austregesil launching his second attack), to the context of verbal report in retrospect (the report of the *iudicium*’s verdict following the attack), adds a layer of equivalence meant to represent either Gregory’s very real suspicions, facing opposed opinions and seeking resolution, or merely the report of the judicial proceeding, standing in the absence of firsthand knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Both cohere with the rest of the narrative, each being one more obstacle in the evidence that Gregory and the reader will eventually overcome, and so working in alignment with, rather than in opposition to, Gregory’s reticence. In this instance repetition therefore serves a dual purpose, simultaneously aiding Gregory as textual manipulator, and obstructing any casual or superficial reading.

We have touched upon a few ways in which repetition is put to functional use by Gregory. The analysis so far has been concerned with redundancy within the narrative discourse confronted by the reader, rather than that of the narrative world, confronted by the characters within the story. The *interfectis pueris* mentioned already is given twice in report early in 7.47 by the narrator, first in describing Austregesil’s attack, and then in summarizing the verdict of the *iudicium*. The reader never hears directly from Austregesil or the judgement of the council, the information comes only from the voice of the narrator.

This style of narration is significant when considered in comparison with other stylistic choices throughout the two episodes. When the voice of a character does surface in direct speech, it is Gregory admonishing his flock. His urging to those involved in the violence to abstain from sin appears to be just another bishop offering support as he should, but in retrospect is realized as a forecast for the tragic end of Sichar, our chief suspect. And here the similarity pattern brought out by alliterative phrasing mentioned earlier acts to book-end the message in a kind of miniature chiasmus.<sup>58</sup> Gregory offers the money of the

<sup>57</sup> The *Pactus Legis Salicae* has provisions specifically for Romans, half-free men (*letis*) or servants (*pueri*) who have been killed by a band of men (*contubernio*). See Drew, *Laws of the Salian Franks* (n. 43 above) s.v., “XLII: Concerning Homicides Committed by a Band of Men,” 106.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, “‘Ecce enim! Etsi illi, qui noxae subditur, minor est facultas, argento aeclisiae redemitur; interim anima viri non pereat.’ Et haec dicens, optuli argentum aeclisiae”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430. Gregory was partial to chiasmic construction in his writing, as has been pointed out by multiple scholars, including Max Bonnet in his study of Gregory’s Latin, *Le Latin de Gregoire de Tours* (Paris 1890) 720; Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 167, draws attention to Gregory’s “bracketing,” or “framing” of Chilperic using the character of

Church in direct speech, and then the reader is told of the completed offer in reported action. The message that separates the offer as prospective action from the action as report reflects the rationale behind Gregory's charity, "so that meanwhile, the soul of a man may not perish."<sup>59</sup> This, of course, is implicitly what occurs, the loose-living Sichar perishes at Chramnesind's axe, and his soul along with him. This message is the chiasmic crux made conspicuous by the nearly equivalent alliterations before and after.

Rising back up to the level of plot, the various entrances and exits of the episodes' cast of characters illuminate the parallel strands that serve Gregory's two principle aims. Sichar, determined by Gregory and the reader in the end to be an unrepentant violent offender, is named in association with the opening violence, but is not necessarily a participant, while Chramnesind does not appear until the second *iudicium*, with four outbreaks of violent action already having taken place in the episode. Meanwhile, there are at least two other characters involved in the violence as perpetrators, in addition to the group of *armatis viris* that allegedly join Sichar, or the familial relations that join Chramnesind in sacking Sichar's house at the close of Book 7.<sup>60</sup> Each new violent actor in Gregory's drama is simultaneously a suspect and a denizen, the former speaking more to Gregory's murder mystery aesthetic, an obstacle in the mutual predicament of the reader and narrator as judges; the latter falling in line with Gregory's worldview, and thus ideology, because though this or that newly introduced actor may not be the chief culprit, he undoubtedly stands apart from the drama's one paragon, the Church vis-à-vis Gregory himself.

For every repeated fight there are new faces, each one adding another sign post toward the constancy of the Church's *beati pacifici* by way of contrast. But repetition also operates to bring us our culprit, handpicked from the cast after repeated suspicions are confirmed. In the finished product, denizen and suspect collapse into one another, demonstrating the functional latitude of similarity patterns for

Salvius of Albi in Books 5, 6, and 7 as a device used by Gregory on several occasions; and Guy Halsall, "The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*: Its Form, Context and Significance," *English Historical Review* 122.496, 300, breaks down the chiasmus of the Book 5 preface to demonstrate the height of Gregory's patterned history writing, and points to the Bible as the likeliest inspiration for this rhetorical device.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, "...[I]nterim, anima viri non pereat"; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 429.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to Chramnesind's *parentibus et amicis* and Sichar's *armatis viris*, the two other named perpetrators are Austregesil and Audinus. This also leaves out the unnamed person who killed a servant at the opening of 7.47, the groups that took part in the battle outside of the church immediately following, or the servant who wounds Sichar with Sichar's own sword.

accomplishing narrative ends at multiple levels of the discourse. For Sichar is a suspect until the end of the second episode, and then never mentioned again in the *Histories*, but his sin places him in the overflowing pool of denizens that mark many of its pages. The reader can then place the pattern of two episodes side-by-side with the rhythm and theme of the *Histories* more generally, the structure of repetition creating formal unity in functional variety.

FOLLOWING GREGORY'S CHRONOLOGY: PERSUASION  
AND DISSUASION THROUGH TIME

Gregory's manipulation of time in the *Histories* can be sudden and fast-paced to the extreme, slowing, speeding, or leaping ahead with very little notice. The reader discovers meaning in the narrative in part through the working out of discontinuities visible in the presentation of events, and so chronological manipulation goes hand-in-hand with reticence and omissions, and opposite—but not necessarily opposing—repetition. The perceptible omission of some link in the expected chronology invites the reader to infer from the available evidence, until retrospect may provide answers to close the gaps. Retrospection occupies a pole opposite prospection on a spectrum of temporal dynamics in narrative presentation. Where prospection has the potential to forecast the future through artful transparency, retrospection constructs the reading sequence with the future opaque, so as to emulate human experience.<sup>61</sup>

Retrospection has the advantage of aligning reader with narrator and character in the interpretative ordeal of the narrative, with all seeming to move along in linear time. As this mimetic feature moves the narrative from early to late, new developments provide valuable information for closing gaps, whether recognizable or covert.<sup>62</sup> Sichar's true identity is revealed to the reader retrospectively, his secret destruction of Chramnesind's relations a surprise that is only confirmed in the closing lines of the final episode. Through the temporal dynamics of retrospection, the narrator feigns ignorance in the imitation of historical time to reproduce the historical event.

In the opening lines of the Sichar and Chramnesind affair, the ebb and flow of the narrative are striking, with violent action and attempted settlement demonstrating in no overtly explicit way that while Gregory's cognizance of time and his adherence to chronology are generally consistent, the narrative avoids any uniform treatment of time. According to the rules of causality and in the interests of retrospection,

<sup>61</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (n. 13 above) 265.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 272.

Gregory's narrative often follows a linear flow in relating cause to effect, beginning to end, action to outcome, but a narrative need not, and Gregory's often does not, explicitly reveal its strategic use of chronological organization.<sup>63</sup> Chronology guides but does not control, as one could argue it does for the annalist and chronicler (though even here control may slacken). Actions, like the brawling of several Tourainians, are important anchors which may secure pacing, but action does not always extend to include large spatial or temporal movement. Sichar's quarrel presumably takes him from the town of Manthelan to that of Tours very quickly, though any time reckoning is implicit, and confirmation of the change in location does not come until Austrigesil stands before the *iudicium* of the first settlement. Although rife with minute details, Gregory's pictorial parataxis proceeds with seeming abandon, recounting the flotsam and jetsam of his society with an eye more towards ideology in action than history under close and consistent temporal scrutiny, regularly shunning any kind of mechanical *poesis*, and subverting what we might expect from a diligent history.

With Sichar and Chramnesind, the treatment of time through relative orientation and vague phrasing serves the frantic pace of these episodes. The opening orientation, "then" (*tunc*), offers little to the reader in the way of temporal anchorage, and only when Gregory describes the Christmas festivities in Manthelan does the reader feel on more stable footing. But to answer which year contains said Christmas, the reader must look backward to 7.24 for "the tenth year of King Childebert's reign," and forward to 8.1 for "the twenty-fourth year of [Guntram's] reign," to help situate Sichar and Chramnesind's quarrel in the year 585. While Gregory's preference for vague datings suggests a historian little concerned with precisely situating his episodes in time, there is ample evidence in Gregory's determinations of time throughout the *Histories* to the contrary.

In his consideration of Gregory's chronology, Breukelaar has pointed out that when viewed in comparison with instances where Gregory gives an exact determination of time in his episodes, his use of relative or vague datings serve a rhetorical function. "Vague dating offers the possibility of applying a second principle of order in addition to the chronological."<sup>64</sup> Such principles allow for persuasion through contrast and the presentation of lessons within unspecified timelines,

<sup>63</sup> Sternberg, "Time and Space in Biblical (Hi)story Telling: The Grand Chronology," *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, MA 1990) 82: "From early to late is not only the order of nature but also the order of causality, hence of plot coherence." Recall that as many as three years passed between the episodes of the feud between Sichar and Chramnesind (n. 41 above).

<sup>64</sup> Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority* (n. 49 above) 143.

“more of the kind typical of fairy-tales than of the kind modern history requires.”<sup>65</sup> But Gregory’s persuasive play with time in his narrative was not without constraint, and suggest a historian fully in control of his material, even if he sometimes relied on inaccurate sources for his information. The lessons in support of ideology cooperate with the demands of the disciplined historian to form this persuasive narrative.

Gregory used a variety of datings in the *Histories*, to suit a variety of purposes, but in the finished product all cohere with the thrust of the narrative whole. Among these dating habits, Gregory most consistently traces the successions of the bishops of Tours and Clermont as signal events in the chronology of his narrative, with reference to regnal years, such as to the reigns of Childebert and Guntram, noted above, coming in second.<sup>66</sup> The significance of these markers for Gregory is fairly obvious. As was discussed in the Introduction, Gregory had extensive familial ties to Tours and Clermont, and as bishop of Tours, was often caught between warring Merovingian nobles. The succession of authority figures from these quarters of society would affect the individual as well as the collective.<sup>67</sup> But despite these multiple lines of dating, chronological markers are few and far between, our narrator more often opting for generic temporal sequiturs (at this time, recently, in the next spring, etc.). In the face of demonstrated ability to date events, Gregory’s preference for loose dating at the episodic level suggests a double standard for chronological adherence, and speaks to the presence of intention at every step of the discourse. That he chooses to date some of his episodes specifically and others loosely signifies where historiography goes down in the face of ideology, where historical time bows to the working of the divine will in lessons of morality. Yet questions naturally arise concerning Gregory’s maneuvering of his narrative between specific and loose chronology. To serve both as moralist and accurate recorder, how does Gregory reconcile these two approaches to time, so seemingly at odds with each other?

Within his interpretive model for the poetics of biblical narrative, Sternberg differentiates between two different levels of temporal deformation: tactical and strategic, or what he refers to in the Bible’s case as

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 142.

<sup>66</sup> In Breukelaar’s opinion, these differing schemes for dating reflect the influence of Tours beyond its own borders. This is not necessarily the function of such chronological coordination, and could merely be Gregory pinning chronological effort to each of his thematic priorities: miracles and slaughters. In either case, the fact remains that Gregory was on average in favour of relative, vague forms of dating rather than more precise references to the years of public functionaries. Breukelaar notes that only 18 percent of the stories in the *Histories* receive dates from Gregory. See *ibid.* 142–148.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 154.

“local dechronologizing and grand chronology.”<sup>68</sup> At the episodic level, the narrator enjoys freer play with chronology, deforming it in order to accomplish some loftier goal in the service of didacticism. Pull back for a wider view, at the book level and in the work overall, and the larger chronology shows to have fallen into proper linear sequence. By and large, the *Histories* follows the arrow of time in tracing the beginning of the world up to Gregory's final days, with explicit markers along the way.<sup>69</sup> The reader may observe a manipulated local chronology, but will eventually be lead back to the grand chronology as Gregory the historian seeks to keep to the course of history.<sup>70</sup>

This type of narrative sequencing is visible in Book 2.22–24, which play freely between the temporal anchors that begin (death of St. Martin in 397) and end (death of Clovis in 511) the Book. In episodes revolving around the life of Sidonius Apollinaris, Gregory deforms the relative chronology to the point of simultaneity, and guides the reading operation through repetition. Temporal manipulation can render simultaneous events in the discourse that result in surprise, suspense or curiosity, and demand that the reader fill gaps not only across the timeline, but also at multiple, because simultaneous, levels of the discourse. In the arrangement and description of simultaneous events in reality, language can ever only say one thing at a time.<sup>71</sup> This linguistic restriction lends itself to operations where simultaneous events are given a sequence by necessity, but also by artistic logic. This is certainly true for Gregory's parataxis, which will occasionally include transitional time phrases in order to express temporal simultaneity, such as, “while these things were happening,” (*dum haec agerentur*) or “at the same time,” (*per idem tempus*) or even simply, “meanwhile,” (*interim*).<sup>72</sup> In Book 2, three episodes center on the life of Sidonius Apollinaris, each episode twisting chronology to dramatize and moralize history.

<sup>68</sup> Sternberg, “The Grand Chronology” (n. 62 above) 84.

<sup>69</sup> Breukelaar puts the completion of the running narrative of the *Histories* in the autumn of 591 or winter of 592. For discussion of the issue of determining the date for the completion of the *Histories*, see Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority* (n. 49 above) 51–70.

<sup>70</sup> Gregory afforded himself what Breukelaar terms “artificial structuring,” as opposed to “natural structuring,” in presenting events in a linear time sequence. See *ibid.* 306.

<sup>71</sup> Sternberg, “The Grand Chronology” (n. 62 above) 96, “Concurrence itself cannot but emerge in sequence.”

<sup>72</sup> Gregory, *LH* 10.9; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 491, “While these things were happening the Bretons were busy ravaging the open country round Nantes and Rennes”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 556. Gregory, *LH* 1.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 30, “At the same time a certain Injuriousus, who was a wealthy man sprung from a senatorial family in Clermont-Ferrand, asked for the hand in marriage of a young woman in similar circumstances”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 95. Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 367, “Meanwhile the news reached Tours that Sichar was dead”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 430.

The three episodes spanning Book 2.22 to 2.24 are introduced at the end of 2.21, where upon the death of Eparchius we are told of the succession of Bishop Sidonius, “a man of most noble birth as honors are counted in this world.”<sup>73</sup> In the following episode, Sidonius amazes a church crowd with an extempore presentation of a church service, the book with which he normally conducts the service having been stolen. This took place “one day” (*quadam die*), and the episode includes reference to Gregory’s (now lost) work on the masses of Sidonius, where Sidonius’s impressive delivery is more fully explained (*plenius declaravimus*). This indication of a more detailed account leads the reader to speculate on the narrator’s purpose for condensing the episode, especially when up to this point in the *Histories*, Gregory has demonstrated no special unwillingness to render events in lengthy prose.<sup>74</sup> The curiosity generated by Gregory’s admission of edition in the middle of Book 2.22 will be retrospectively satisfied in Book 2.23.

The next episode, which begins, “And when he [Sidonius] ... was leading a holy, earthly life, two priests rose up against him.”<sup>75</sup> After establishing Sidonius as “saintly” (*sanctus*) in the previous episode, the reader has already been positioned to expect the moral right to reside with him. True enough, the two priests remove Sidonius from his episcopal seat of power, and submit him to “every kind of contumely.”<sup>76</sup> How and why exactly this was done, we are not told.<sup>77</sup> The narrator then forecasts divine action: “God in his clemency did not permit this insult to go long unpunished.”<sup>78</sup> To realize the enactment of this forecast within the bounds of the episode, considerable manipulation of the temporal sequence is required. After the first priest dies on a lavatory seat—in imitation of Arius, a primary object of Gregory’s en-

<sup>73</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.21; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 67, “[V]ir secundum saeculi dignitatem nobilissimus”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 134.

<sup>74</sup> Consider Book 2.10, where Gregory covers in considerable detail an overview of the Biblical relationship between humans and God evident in the Scriptures. This overview is given after introducing the Franks as historically established idolaters. The whole episode stands at 559 words, dwarfing the 113 found at 2.22.

<sup>75</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 68, “Cumque ... et sanctam ageret in saeculo vitam, surrexerunt contra eum duo presbiteri”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 135.

<sup>76</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 68, “Ad summam eum contumeliam redigerunt”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 135.

<sup>77</sup> Goffart mentions this episode, but only to highlight that in his retelling of Sidonius’ life in the *Histories*, Gregory sought to stress the man’s “charity, humility and helplessness, rather than magnificence,” as a way of renouncing senatorial pride. See Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (n. 4 above) 193 n. 346.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 68, “Sed non longi temporis spatio inultam eius iniuriam divina voluit sustinere clementia”; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 135.

mity—the episode stretches the timeline beyond Sidonius's life.<sup>79</sup> The latter part of the episode details the inevitable divine vengeance visited upon the second unnamed priest, this one falling dead upon a servant's completed recitation of a vision, relaying Sidonius's threats of punishment.<sup>80</sup> But this vengeance comes after Sidonius has taken a fever and died.<sup>81</sup> And following in 2.24 we have been brought back with, "In the days of Sidonius," detailing the admirable conduct of one Ecdicius during a time of famine.

At the episodic level, then, the three episodes at Book 2.22–24 take their start during Sidonius's life, but 2.23 runs the temporal course necessary to communicate the lesson. The dictates of divine punishment outrank those of linear temporal sequence, and once again the discipline of the historian is subverted by the discipline of the Christian. The authority of the narrator gains its strength through the authority of the divine, as God's promise to not permit the insult to go long unpunished is kept by the narrator's manipulation of historical time.

Where chronology is deformed, repetition works to explain temporal incongruity through comparison or contrast. Following Sidonius's extempore sermon, Book 2.22 ends with him removing silver vessels (*vasa argentea*) from his home to give to the poor. Compare this with 2.23, which ends in the unruly priest's dropping of his drinking vessel (*calicem*) as he also dropped dead, "the Lord having passed his earthly judgement."<sup>82</sup> Placed one after the other in the text, the juxtaposition between Sidonius's charity and the unnamed priest's avarice could hardly be sharper, the combination of events along the ideological, rather than historiographical, axis enabling the effectiveness of the repetition. But both axes lie within Gregory's purview, and by 2.24, we are once again in the presence of a living Sidonius, his lifetime providing the temporal anchor that brings the *Histories* back to the concerns of history.

All this to say the *Histories* pursues a mixed mode of disclosure, reflecting a world made logical under the dominion of an omniscient ruler, whose lessons for humankind avoid any single, conventional treatment of time. This condition in the world of the text bears directly

<sup>79</sup> This is the first mention of Arius in the *Histories*, who died in 336. He next resurfaces in the prologue to Book 3, in a comparison of orthodoxical and heterodoxical exemplars down from biblical times to Gregory's day. See Thorpe (n. 2 above) 161. For discussion of this prologue, see Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* (n. 4 above) 125.

<sup>80</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 69; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 137, "Haec eo loquente, exterritus presbiter, elapsus de manu calicem, reddidit spiritum."

<sup>81</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 68; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 135, "Factum est autem post haec, ut accedente febre aegrotare coepisset."

<sup>82</sup> Gregory, *LH* 2.23; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 69; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 137, "Tale iudicium super contumaces clericos Dominus in hunc praetulit mundum ..."

on the dynamics of retrospection and prospection, and with them suspense and surprise. In the first part of the Sichar affair, Gregory demonstrates that within an episode chronology may be blurred to serve a blistering pace in the service of heightened drama. The prospection of conflict in the opening lines of 7.47, “A most serious civil discord now arose between the citizens of Tours,” creates suspense for the reader that remains palpable until the settlement that ends the episode.<sup>83</sup> After the discord has clearly arisen, lasting an unspecified amount of time during 585, and beginning sometime around Christmas, the last attempt at settlement is presumed to be successful, the reader’s suspense relieved. But by connecting the episode in Book 7 with that in Book 9—a span of three years or more—the narrator shows us that while events may be temporally condensed in order to heighten suspense through juxtaposition (violence and settlement) and a fast pace, duration may serve to provide the lesson with greater impact in retrospect.

Rather than deform the sequence of his chronology to place the first episode next to the concluding conflict in order to heighten the dramatic climax—in the manner 2.22–23 proceeded—he instead chooses to reflect the temporal separation by maintaining that separation in the narrative. Given the context, the choice to maintain the temporal distance lent itself to communicating the lesson. Where in Book 2 the contrast between Sidonius and the unruly priests and their swift demises drove home the timeless reach of the divine will, here the space between episodes further accentuates the difficulty that was felt by the narrator, and once again Gregory can be said to be passing the difficulty on for the reader’s “benefit.” After reading through Book 8 with no mention of the rivalry from the end of Book 7, Gregory takes full advantage of the temporal gap to deliver the true end of the conflict to a surprised reader in Book 9, while simultaneously demanding they return to Book 7 to retrace their steps. Here narrative time recreates historical time. Sichar’s culpability is borne by retrospection, and the clues that were there all along may have fallen beneath the reader’s gaze as the narrative frantically raced from one crime to the next in the fulfillment of prospection.

What we have, then, in Gregory’s disclosure of information, and with it his manipulation of time, is a rich and intricate combinatory flexibility, permitting the reader with every reading operation to look ahead with a sense of the future in mind, only to have that sense altered retrospectively in the final execution of the lesson. But whether that lesson shifts the reader’s perspective radically or by degrees, with each

<sup>83</sup> Gregory, *LH* 7.47; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 366; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 428, “Gravia tunc inter Toronicos cives bella civilia surrexerunt.”

additional case the world view of the narrator is brought into closer alignment with that of the reader through Gregory's persuasive art.

#### CONCLUSION: GREGORY'S RHETORIC OF NARRATIVE INTEREST

Gregory's narrative has revealed a functional poetics capable of considerable flexibility, and yet maintaining with general consistency its purpose as caretaker of Catholic ideology, accomplishing this through a highly versatile narrative aesthetic, which harmonizes the often conflicting demands of historiography and ideology. An exploration of Gregory's use of repetitions, omissions, and time manipulations in his narrative has revealed his ability to harness narrative devices otherwise functionally at odds with one another (omission vs. repetition) to produce a unitary artistic logic. Complex, demanding narrative history results from the coalescence of these literary devices, constituting a poetics of indirection that sets obstacles for the reader that re-produce the human experience of the historical event.

The Sichar and Chramnesind affair presents itself as a leading test case for the application of Sternberg's interpretive model. Beginning with the author's reticence and omissions, the feud between local folk becomes an agonizing search for the truth, reached via a narrow path marked by pitfalls on either side. With repetition, the search becomes easier by degrees, the path of the proper reading operation receiving several signposts to guide the way, but still leaving intact a tangle of interpretation meant to dissuade the casual reader. Gregory's play with time rounds off the coordinating devices that have shaped the drama, producing the end resolution with combined force. Having come to the end and looked back, the realization of a shared perspective between reader and narrator signals the completion of the persuasive enterprise.

As to the governing principles which these devices ultimately serve, the aesthetic stands out in its role as imaginative enhancer. Some of its salient manifestations in the determination of Sichar's guilt included Gregory's speech to the warring parties, quoting Scripture in his attempt to stop the bloodshed; Chramnesind's interior monologue, an anticipation for the reader of the imminent violence against Sichar; and last but not least, Chramnesind's dramatic confession before King Chilperic, providing the reader with the last crucial piece of the historiographic puzzle.

In terms of selection and arrangement, the dual theme in Gregory's narrative of miracles and slaughters expressed in the preface to Book 2 assumes high priority in the *Histories*, providing the thematic framework in which the world of the text is situated, but still allowing for ample space in which the governing principles may maneuver. That said, Gregory's drama of reading still aims to maintain the

complementarity of historiographical and ideological principles in the handling of the discourse whenever possible.

The preceding analysis constitutes only a cursory sampling of Gregory's persuasive capabilities. But if nothing else, I hope my treatment of his *Histories* will encourage others to hazard their own close reading of this endlessly fascinating source for the early middle ages. Building as I did in my analysis on the important work done in recent years by Goffart, Heinzlmann, and Breukelaar to shed light on Gregory's literary proficiencies, there is yet work to be done to map out the extent of his intricate story-telling patterns beyond the few highlighted here. Beyond this, comparative studies that consider authors such as Orosius and Eusebius using Sternberg's toolkit would invariably yield insights that could contribute to a better understanding of Gregory's works, and the narrative poetics of the early middle ages in general.

In the concluding chapter of the *Histories*, Gregory exhorts the reader multiple times to maintain his works as they are, and to refrain from destroying or rewriting them in any way.<sup>84</sup> Even if you have been instructed in the Seven Liberal Arts by Martianus Capella himself, and are an acknowledged master in all of these skills, despite all this, "do not, I beg you, do violence to my books."<sup>85</sup> In my application of Sternberg's model, in an attempt to better understand better Gregory's poetics, I hope that I have not let the bishop down.

<sup>84</sup> Gregory, *LH* 10.31; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 536; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 603, "[U]t numquam libros hos aboleri faciatis aut rescribi, quasi quaedam eligentes et quaedam praeter-mittentes, sed ita omnia vobiscum integra inlibataque permaneant, sicut a nobis relicta sunt."

<sup>85</sup> Gregory, *LH* 10.31; MGH SRM (n. 2 above) 1.1, 536; Thorpe (n. 2 above) 603, "Quod si te ... quicumque es, Martianus noster septem disciplinis erudiit, ... si in his omnibus ita fueris exercitatus, ... nec sic quoque, deprecor, ut avellas quae scripsi."