

FOREIGNERS IN THE *HISTORIES* OF GREGORY OF TOURS *

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In the year 590, the senior Frankish king decided that something had to be done to punish the Bretons for several years of plundering across their borders. So he raised an army and set two commanders at its head, one of whom was called Beppolen; and the army was sent to ravage Brittany. A Frankish queen, however, hated Beppolen for having deserted her service. She therefore ordered some of her subjects, who lived near the war zone, to cut their hair in the Breton fashion and to put on Breton clothes: thus disguised, they were to join in the fighting and fall upon Beppolen's detachment. The queen's stratagem worked. Beppolen was brought to battle and perished in the fighting (10.9).

Gregory of Tours tells this story in the final book of his *Histories*. It is the only passage in which he indicates that an ethnic group had a national style of haircut and wore a kind of national costume. Even here, Gregory's purpose is not to convey information about the Bretons but to document a stratagem by a queen whom he considered to be particularly wicked.

Oddly enough, this same queen, whose name was Fredegonde, is associated with a majority of the ethnic traits that Gregory grudgingly records. A second case occurs in the following manner. A very damaging feud was taking place between two families of Franks living at Tournai; many killings had occurred, the collateral relatives had begun to be involved, and it seemed impossible to establish peace between the feuding parties. Queen Fredegonde was at

Tournai, and she issued warnings to the three surviving feuders to make peace; but they took no notice. So she invited the trio to dinner, got them drunk, and, when they were suitably stupefied, had them killed (10.27). The ethnic trait turns up in Gregory's account of Fredegonde's dinner party: "She invited a great number of people to supper and she made the three survivors sit on the same bench. The meal lasted a long time, until darkness fell. The table was then removed, as is the Frankish custom . . ." ¹ The removal of the table seems to have been the prelude to the evening's serious drinking.

This happens to be the only national Frankish custom that Gregory sees fit to report. ² The Franks were, of course, a very firm fixture of Gregory's world. His main hero was the Frankish king Clovis, the Catholic convert who had died in 511 after establishing his progeny as sole rulers of Gaul. Gaul had been the Frankish kingdom even before Gregory was born, and it continues as France to bear the Frankish name down to the present day. Although dozens of non-royal Franks appear in Gregory's *Histories*, it is never said that a Frankish language was spoken in Gaul, or that there was any difficulty of communication between Latin-speaking Gallo-Romans like Gregory and their Frankish masters. Gregory does specify that the Frankish kings wore their hair long, and that one way to bar them from succession to the throne was to cut off their long locks (2.9; 3.18; 6.24). It seems, therefore, that there was at least a royal Frankish hair style. But there is a little puzzle here, since Gregory never intimates that ordinary Franks, or any others for that matter, were allowed only short haircuts. We are left wondering, therefore, if and how the long hair of Frankish princes differed from the long hair of anyone else.

A little more attention should be given to the one common Frankish custom that Gregory mentions -- the removal of the table after food had been served and eaten. It reminds us, among other things, that the Roman practice was to recline at meals, whereas our own practice has become the "barbarian" one of sitting up and dining off a common board. Our tables now stay in place, but this is a comparatively recent practice. What Gregory calls a Frankish custom -- taking the table away -- persisted as a European eating habit in great houses down to at least the seventeenth century. In fact, it is the explanation for the part of a meal that is still called "dessert." When the food had been eaten, the diners withdrew from the hall to an adjacent room while the servants carried out the "dis-service," that is to say, they cleared away the dishes and platters and, indeed, removed the table itself, so as to

make room for the ensuing entertainment. While this "dis-service" or "dessert" was going on, the waiting diners were served sweets and dainties, in the same way that we ourselves finish our meals.³ For the Franks of Tournai, the final course served to them by Queen Fredegonde was somewhat bloodier -- a savoury rather than a sweet; but the removal of the table remains as the one distinctive Frankish custom that Gregory chooses to tell about.

The two other foreign traits that Gregory associates with Queen Fredegonde are more loosely described by him as "barbarian." The word "barbarian" occurs very rarely in Gregory. He usually labels people by their ethnic names or, in the case of Gallo-Romans, by a reference to their cities of origin. When Gregory does use "barbarian," the word has a variety of meanings. Sometimes, it looks like a synonym for "soldier" or "fighting man"; in three instances, including one that will be presently discussed, "barbarian" is associated with paganism or superstition; for the rest, it is, perhaps, just a synonym for "Frank."⁴ In any event, Gregory was perfectly accustomed to living among "barbarians"; he used the term quite neutrally, and he did not expect anyone to be offended by being so labelled. Gregory's usage corresponds, in general, to what had been the standard language of Gaul for over a century -- that is to say, the usage of a land in which Roman provincials had been cohabiting more or less harmoniously for many generations with non-Romans of various kinds, and in which the word "barbarian" was normally a neutral label that Franks, Burgundians, or whoever did not mind being applied to themselves.⁵

The first custom that Gregory calls "barbarian" is associated with a shady character named Claudius. (Incidentally, it is interesting to find a barbarian practice attached to someone with so characteristically Roman a name as Claudius.⁶) The senior Frankish king had ordered Claudius to decoy a murder suspect from the shrine in which he had taken asylum. In order to increase the profitability of this delicate mission, Claudius went to visit Queen Fredegonde, who had falsely accused the suspect in the first place and forced him to flee to sanctuary. Fredegonde loaded Claudius with presents, promised him much more if he succeeded, and urged him not to be scrupulous in his methods, but rather to kill the suspect at the first opportunity, even at the risk of desecrating a church. Claudius left her with great hopes and travelled to the shrine. "As he was on his way," Gregory says, "he began to look out for omens, as is the custom of barbarians, and to say that they were unfavourable to him."⁷ The omens turned out to be right; Claudius succeeded in killing the suspect, but he died wretchedly in doing so (7.29).

Gregory's phrase deserves a closer look. For "omens" he uses the Latin word *auspicia*, whose original sense involves the ancient Roman religious practice of observing the flight of birds. It seems doubtful that Claudius was particularly concerned with aviary omens; he was on the lookout for any and all accidental signs that might intimate whether he would or would not be successful in his dangerous undertaking.⁸ What Gregory means by "barbarian custom" is simply superstition or pagan practice -- conduct unbecoming a proper believing Christian, but surely not conduct that was limited to non-Romans.

Gregory's other barbarian custom is more secular, and it again involves kindly Queen Fredegonde. This time, she was living in the city of Rouen and was rather unhappy at her circumstances (7.19-20). In order to relieve her feelings, she decided to settle scores with an old enemy of hers, the bishop of the city. Or so it seemed in view of Fredegonde's record. For in the small hours of Easter morning, while the bishop was participating in the early office, an unknown assailant mortally stabbed him and got clean away. Fredegonde visited the bishop as he lay dying and offered him the services of her doctors but he outrightly accused her of being the author of his assassination. Soon afterwards, he died. Rouen was in an uproar, and one of the local Frankish dignitaries was rash enough to go to Fredegonde and to threaten her with a careful investigation of the crime. After he withdrew,

. . . she sent after him to invite him to take a meal with her. He refused. She then begged that, if he would not eat with her, he would at least have a drink. For this he stopped. He was given a glass and swallowed some absinthe mixed with wine and honey, as is the custom of barbarians. It was poisoned. Even as he drank it he felt a great pain in his chest . . . his eyes went blank, he clambered onto his horse, rode for less than half a mile and then fell dead to the ground.⁹

If the dramatic reverberations of this story are allowed to dissipate, and if the homicides are ignored, then surely the most obtrusive word in the passage is "absinthe." As everyone knows, the favourite aperitif of modern France -- a green substance that turns cloudy white when diluted with water -- is marketed under the brand names Pernod, Pastis, and Ricard, all of which are absinthe-substitutes; the substitute was introduced after real absinthe was banned in 1915 on the grounds of being a toxic substance. Might this popular French drink descend from the days of the Merovingian Franks? Well, not quite

directly. For one thing, the lethal absinthe was a distilled liquor, and distillation reached Europe from the Islamic world only in the thirteenth century. Besides, the concentrated extract of wormwood from which absinthe was made seems to have been a discovery of the early nineteenth century; it was a Swiss invention, originally thought to have beneficent medicinal properties.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Gregory does say absinthe, probably referring to the pungently bitter wormwood plant, which was well known in Antiquity and widely used as a flavouring. I tend to think, therefore, that what Queen Fredegonde put her poison into was a barbaric anticipation of Campari or vermouth. Gregory clearly distances himself from decoctions of this kind. Presumably, civilized men like himself drank only pure wine, a wise precaution against being poisoned.

The last has now been said of Queen Fredegonde, who eventually died a natural death, unpunished for her many crimes. More surprisingly, a majority of the ethnic traits that are to be found in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours have been surveyed. The time has come perhaps to say a little about Gregory and his writings, and about why there is interest in observing the peculiarly limited place that Gregory accords to the various dimensions of foreignness.

Gregory was born toward 540. His home territory was the Auvergne, in the south-central part of modern France; his family was old, rich, and prominent, so that Gregory had connections in many other districts. He was educated at Lyons, whose bishop was his great-uncle, and when he became bishop of Tours in 573, he took over a see that had just been vacated by a cousin and with all but five of whose previous holders Gregory claimed to be related.¹¹ Late Roman Gaul contained a resident aristocracy whose members were now and again appointed to some high office in the Roman imperial government and held this position for a brief term, typically one year; with the office, they acquired the lifelong dignity of a Roman senator. By the later sixth century, when Gregory wrote, the Roman government had long vanished in the West; the Franks, as said before, had been ruling Gaul since the early 500's; but the great families survived with their wealth and standing unimpaired, and they still prided themselves on being senatorial, owing to their descent from the authentic senators of the fifth and earlier centuries. In Gregory's time, the main ambition of the senatorial families seems to have been to attain a bishopric.¹² Sometimes this happened only in middle age, after the future bishop had married and had had children. Gregory, however, was brought up from the first as a churchman, and he was appointed bishop near the earliest canonical age for obtaining this rank, that is, at thirty.

Almost as soon as Gregory came to Tours, he became an author, and in the twenty-odd years that elapsed before his death in 594 he completed two large blocks of writings. One block is devoted to celebrating the saints and their miracles, most of all, the miracles of St. Martin, whose shrine at Tours was the most famous holy place of Gaul and the special pride of Gregory, who never forgot that he ruled the bishopric of Tours as St. Martin's successor. The second half of Gregory's oeuvre is composed of the ten books of *Histories*. Books I and IV cover a large time span, from the Creation of the world to A.D. 398 in Book I, and then less sketchily from 398 to 575 in Books II to IV. In the next six books, which occupy 350 pages or two-thirds of Lewis Thorpe's Penguin translation, Gregory writes as a direct contemporary, an immediate observer, and a frequent participant. These books are so filled with action, colour, drama, detail, and anecdote that one is astonished to realize that, in them, Gregory chronicles the events of only fifteen years.

It can be said without exaggeration that Gregory's *Histories* are the most ambitious and admirable work of Latin historiography between Orosius in 417 and Bede in 730. No extended piece of narrative had ever before been written so far north, and distantly from the Mediterranean. His qualities as a story teller, which have already been illustrated, were immediately recognized, and he has never lacked for admirers, spellbound by his talent for evoking such charming creatures as Queen Fredegonde and her colourful contemporaries.

But there is more to Gregory than storytelling. The whole sixth century contains only one comparable observer and contemporary historian. This is Procopius, who wrote in Greek and was a subject of the emperor Justinian. His extensive account of Justinian's wars began to appear two decades before Gregory set to work.¹³ A detailed examination of the relative merits and demerits of Procopius and Gregory would necessarily resemble a comparison of oranges and apples. One might not perhaps be too far wrong in claiming that Gregory's work seems considerably more relaxed, personal, and in tune with sixth-century conditions than that of Procopius. In part, this is because Gregory has no grandiose theme, comparable to the great wars of Justinian in Procopius, or even comparable to Bede's glorification, a century later, of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Gregory's only apparent object, as he says in his prefaces, is to record the good things and bad things going on in the world about him, and to preserve them for posterity in the peculiarly tangled way that, in reality, good things and bad things have always occurred. He wrote out of concern, not idle curiosity. If the contemporary scene needed written commemoration it was because only a historian, even one as ill-equipped

as Gregory claimed to be, could translate the blur of events into meaningful narrative.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Gregory's work is disconcerting in its lack of themes; there are no politics, no foreign relations, no conflict between church and state or between aristocracy and monarchy -- no collective pigeon-holes of any kind: only individual actors and incidents. Because of his attention to particulars, Gregory is an incomparable observer. Our best hope of grasping the earliest decades of the Middle Ages is to look at them through his eyes.

Yet, when it comes to foreigners, Gregory offers little guidance. This is not because the population of Gregory's *Histories* is ethnically homogeneous. It is anything but that. He portrays not only Franks and Bretons, Burgundians and Goths, but also Thuringians, Huns, Lombards, and even Persarmenians. The eight nationalities just named hardly exhaust the list. When the Frankish king Guntram solemnly entered the city of Orleans in July 585, he was acclaimed by the local population in Latin and by the resident Syrians and Jews in their own languages, the three contrasting tongues increasing the splendour of the advent ceremony (8.1). There are plenty of foreigners, therefore, but Gregory does not underline their foreignness, let alone suggest, otherwise than by context, whether a Frank was less alien than a Persarmenian, or whether a Syrian was more or less exotic than a Breton.

One problem is that Gregory has no collective expression for people like himself. We commonly use the term Gallo-Roman to classify Gregory and his kind; Lewis Thorpe even allows this word to penetrate his translation¹⁵; but Gregory has never heard of it. In one of his hagiographic works, he does observe that the Goths of Spain, who were Arian heretics, used the term "Roman" to denote "men of our religion," that is, orthodox Catholics. But "Roman" was not Gregory's word, and he may underline the alienness of the Goths by putting such a usage in their mouths.¹⁶ Gregory's way of classifying persons whom we call Gallo-Romans is to tell us what city they originated from; for example, Firminus of Clermont, Evantius of Arles, Bodegisel of Soissons, and so forth (10.2; 4.40).¹⁷ Gregory's native Auvergne is prominently featured throughout the *Histories*; Gregory saw nothing wrong in a historian's being specially interested in his birthplace and in the city where he was living. Of course, if home is a single city, the number of foreigners becomes overwhelming, and if one's career takes place, like Gregory's, outside one's birthplace, one is bound to spend one's life among strangers. Gregory had a personal occasion to find this out when a priest of his at Tours plotted to

have him driven out of the bishopric; the priest strutted about boasting that "with masterly skill I have purged the city of Tours of the Arvernian rabble" (5.49).¹⁸

Parochialism of this kind met with Gregory's contempt; as he says, the priest failed to realize that most of the previous bishops of Tours had been his relatives. But Gregory also knew how to pillory persons who, in his estimation, damaged their communities by currying favour with outsiders. A series of passages in the *Histories* and hagiographic writings show Gregory relishing the fact that the children and grandchildren of a certain Hortensius never managed to acquire the bishoprics they coveted. The Hortensii were a senatorial family of the Auvergne, and Gregory evidently considered them to be what the twentieth century would call "collaborators." The Franks had made a punitive expedition to the Auvergne when Gregory was still a child. In the wake of this disaster, Hortensius had received the high office of count; later, his grandson had been conspicuous for plying resident Franks with drinks and for rushing to the royal court with gifts and other bribes in order to solicit the bishopric of Clermont. Gregory has nothing against the Franks in principle, but he could recognize unsavoury Arvernian senators when he saw them. Behaviour like theirs was treachery, and, in his view, God Almighty proved the point by providentially keeping the Hortensii from the episcopate.¹⁹

To some extent, therefore, Gregory's concern for cities accurately mirrors the world in which he lived. Narrow localities defined one's identity, and the aliens began at the boundary of the next municipal district. Such localism is normally associated with the Middle Ages, but it seems safe to say that, to a large degree, conditions in the Roman Empire had been no different. Foreignness, however, is a matter of layers or degrees. Only a part of the subject is exhausted by a reference to civic exclusiveness.

Language often provides a practical criterion for ethnic classification. It did for the Venerable Bede, when he carefully distinguished the Britons, Irish, and Picts from the English and from each other.²⁰ Gregory, however, assigns no classifying function to language. As noted before, he never portrays a Frank speaking Frankish or suggests that he had any trouble making himself understood when he visited a royal Frankish court. One even has to look outside the *Histories*, to other writings of his, in order to find him showing any awareness at all of the existence of Germanic languages (one passage will be discussed later). On two occasions, distinguished Goths from Spain passed through Tours and engaged in long theological dialogues with

Gregory; neither time does Gregory make any comment about the language in which the discussions took place. Presumably, the parties conversed in Latin (5.43; 6.40). There is only one instance in the *Histories* in which an interpreter is mentioned. When the need arises for a group of Lombard marauders to exchange words with an eccentric miracle worker, an interpreter is called for and promptly materializes (6.6); but he is incidental to the miracle that occurs soon afterwards. The linguistic dimension no sooner appears than it vanishes. Similarly, the chanting of the Syrians and Jews at Orleans, mentioned above, was described by Gregory in order to heighten the colour of a festal scene, and not to imply the existence of a language barrier. As long-time residents of Gaul, the Syrians and Jews probably were bi- or trilingual. They were an ordinary part of the local landscape rather than foreigners.²¹

Perhaps Gregory's reluctance to make much of language results from the fact that his world seemed more linguistically complex than Bede's. Lombards and Syrians were not alone in speaking strange tongues. Gregory once encountered a religious impostor, a false prophet who moved about with spurious relics. After reporting an acrimonious meeting with him, Gregory observes: "He spoke the language of the common people, his accent was poor and the words he used were vulgar. It was not easy to follow what he was trying to say" (9.6).²² The common people expressed themselves in one way, often difficult for gentlefolk to understand, whereas persons of higher class could be immediately recognized by their accent and vocabulary. There were even gradations or at least regional differences among them, as another story reveals. A Frankish king planned to reward the abbot of a Paris monastery by appointing him to the vacant bishopric of Avignon, but the abbot begged not to be sent so far away, to live among senators practised in logic and judges steeped in philosophy (6.9). Although nothing was presumably wrong with the abbot's diction, some of the Christians of Avignon were bound to outstrip him in formal education and would make him constantly look like an uncouth northerner.²³ In short, there were several ways in Gregory's world of raising barriers by opening one's mouth; language was a badge of class and education as well as of nationality. But Gregory was basically uninterested; most times, he let linguistic differences pass without noting them.

In the cases when Gregory does not mention a city of origin, he usually substitutes the name of an ethnic group; so-and-so is a Frank, a Thuringian, a Burgundian, a Breton, or whatever. Are persons labelled in this way to be considered foreigners? Probably the answer should be "yes," but only on the

understanding that, as noted above, it is very hard to determine whom Gregory regards as a native. When the Lombards invaded Gaul, they met an army of Burgundians and slaughtered them. The next year, when the Lombards returned, a new and talented general had come on the scene; under his leadership the Burgundians surrounded the invaders and inflicted a decisive defeat (4.42). Since Gregory shows that the victorious general originated from the city of Auxerre, he might be imagined to be glorifying the native under whose leadership the Burgundian aliens repelled the even more alien Lombards from Gaul. But Gregory does not encourage such an inference; he never lets himself be caught in chauvinism of this sort. Most of the time, he is an ethnic non-partisan. For instance, he reports the Lombards' invasion of Italy and even their incursions into Gaul without ever intimating that there was anything wrong in principle with such conduct. When Gregory specifies that the Lombards "wandered all over [Italy] for seven years, robbing the churches [and] killing the bishops" (4.41),²⁴ he expects the reader to be duly appalled, but no more so than if a plague or other natural calamity were being reported. In the 580's, one of the Frankish kings decided to lead his army into Italy against the Lombards and, later still, to follow this up with further expeditions (6.42; 9.25, 29; 10.3). Gregory does not hail these enterprises as being appropriate counterattacks. Instead, he specially emphasizes the damage that the expeditionary force committed while still on Frankish soil (10.3). He takes the occasion to express his negative attitude toward military adventures.

Gregory's sympathies are involved, not with any ethnic group as such, but with actions whose morality he approved of. In such cases, he writes in a tone of warm intimacy about even very distant peoples whom he has never seen.²⁵ One instance involves a fight between the Franks and the Saxons on the north-eastern border (4.14). The Franks complained to their king that the Saxons were being unruly and rebellious, but Saxon envoys came to the monarch and repeatedly offered tribute and submission if only they might be granted peace. Gregory recreates the scene complete with direct discourse. The Frankish king was impressed; he said to his people, "Hold back . . . and give up the idea of attacking [the Saxons]. There is no justice in what you are planning to do. You must not march into battle, for we shall be beaten if you do." But the Franks were enraged; they insisted on war and forced the king to lead them. The outcome was predictable: "vast numbers of the Franks were killed by their adversaries . . ." and, in the aftermath, the king had to patch up a disadvantageous peace.²⁶ In case this one lesson might not sufficiently impress, Gregory later reports an exactly similar incident between

some Swabians and a group of migrating Saxons: the Swabians offered generous terms, but the Saxons would not accept less than the whole loaf; a battle therefore took place, and this time the Saxons were annihilated (5.15). Stories like these are somewhat too artistically edifying to elicit complete trust. The fights probably took place, and the contending parties are correctly identified; but one cannot help believing that Gregory seized the occasions they offered, not to sketch a realistic portrait of aggressiveness by Franks or Saxons, but to use the outcomes in such a way as to convey lessons of peace-loving behaviour that he urged upon everyone, regardless of nationality.

The distinction that mattered most to Gregory was the one between orthodoxy and heresy. This is why the Goths of Spain appear repeatedly in an unfavourable light. These Goths -- we call them Visigoths -- adhered to the old Arian heresy (4.4). One of their rulers even had the temerity to be a militant who persecuted the Catholics of Spain; report had it that he repented on his deathbed (5.36; 8.46). The campaign of Clovis against these Goths is the only military enterprise to which Gregory attributes any religious content (2.37). Later, he draws our attention to the Gothic vice of assassinating any king who displeased them (3.30), and he pays careful attention to the civil war in Spain that a Catholic Frankish princess inspired by winning over her Gothic husband to Catholicism (5.36; 6.18, 29, 40, 43; 8.28). These and other passages express Gregory's horror of Arianism, but there are strict limits to his partisanship. He insists on blaming the Catholic prince in the Gothic civil war since he was rebelling against his father (8.43); and when one of the Frankish kings launched a ponderous expedition against Gothic territory, Gregory strikes none of the religious notes that are heard in the account of Clovis's campaign; instead, he dwells, as with the expedition against Lombard Italy, on the terrible damage done by the troops to the friendly lands that they marched through, as well as on their total ineffectuality once enemy territory was reached (8.30).

Until the Spanish Goths were converted to Catholicism, they stand out in Gregory's pages as wicked Arians. So, at an earlier stage, do the Vandals, whose persecutions of Catholics are vividly portrayed as the cause for the downfall of their North African kingdom (2.2-3). It comes as no surprise, besides, that the bad, avaricious emperor Justin II lapsed into heresy just before he went insane (4.40). But Gregory cannot be relied on to use religion as a principle of classification. Although the Franks turn up as pagans early in the *Histories* (2.10), Gregory never specifies the religion of the Lombards, the Saxons, or the Thuringians, or intimates that missionary

activity was being undertaken among them. Soon after our Gregory's death, Pope Gregory the Great sent his famous mission to England. The need for such an undertaking would completely elude a reader of the *Histories* since the Anglo-Saxons make no appearance whatever in them. Gregory twice refers to the Frankish princess whose marriage to King Ethelbert of Kent was (as readers of Bede know) an important prelude to the papal mission; but Gregory's account offers no inkling of what was to come. Neither the girl nor her husband is ever named; Gregory says only that she was married to "a man from Kent," alias "the son of a King of Kent" -- wherever Kent might happen to be (4.26; 9.26).²⁷ That is all. No ethnic name, no paganism. Silence.

The most colourful combination of ethnicity with religion that Gregory offers involves four holy men. One of them was a Breton named Winoch, who turned up in Tours wearing only a rough sheepskin. Gregory warmly welcomed him and ordained him priest (5.21). Many years later, regrettably, Winoch's conspicuous austerity in dress, food, and drink gave way to habitual drunkenness, in the midst of which he turned violent (8.34). "There was nothing for it," says Gregory, "but to chain him up and lock him in his cell. Condemned to this fate, he continued to rave for a couple of years and then he gave up the ghost."²⁸ Incidentally, Winoch is the only glimpse Gregory provides of religion among the Celtic Bretons, even though they were near-neighbours of Tours, and Gregory frequently reports on their leaders and border raiding.²⁹

Another holy man settled into a hermitage at Tours is described as being a Taifal (5.7). Now, the Taifals are a very minor people, first found settled in the lower Danube valley and usually considered akin to the Goths. Almost two centuries before Gregory's time, the Roman government had settled a body of them in the northern reaches of Poitou, somewhat to the west of Tours, where a district named Tiffauges survives down to the present day.³⁰ Except for this holy man, who endured the strains of a hermit's life better than Winoch, Gregory mentions the Taifals on only one occasion -- when they killed their bishop (4.18). This tragedy, as narrated, offers no clue to the Taifals' degree of assimilation. Surely after two centuries of being integrated into Gallic life, they had shed a large measure of their foreignness; but, by Gregory's testimony, they still bore their ethnic name and formed a recognizable group.

The two other holy men in Gregory's narrative had more exotic origins than the pair that has just been seen. Gregory encountered one of them when on a journey to the north-eastern parts of the Frankish kingdom. This was a Lombard, named Vulfoaic, who had spent some years in the arduous exercise

of being a stylite, the Christian equivalent of a flagpole sitter; in other words, Vulfoalaic was a monk whose main austerity consisted in living on top of a pillar. By carrying out this feat in the rain, snow, and frost of the Moselle valley, Vulfoalaic had convinced the local population to overthrow and abandon the idol of Diana to which they were addicted (8.15). Gregory was much taken with Vulfoalaic, who had since come down from his pillar and gathered a group of monks around a church of St. Martin. "While I was there," Gregory says, "I asked [Vulfoalaic] to tell me about the happy event of his conversion and how he, a Lombard by birth, had come to be a clergyman."³¹ The expectations aroused by this remark are soon disappointed. By his own account, Vulfoalaic seems simply to have heard about the miracles of St. Martin and found an abbot near Limoges to train him as a monk. The vital details of how he got to the Frankish kingdom in the first place and how he had turned from a Lombard into a Catholic are omitted as though they hardly mattered.³² The only conversion story Gregory relates -- though not in the *Histories* -- involves a Thuringian, from the wilds of inner Germany. Gregory even goes so far in his case as to gloss a Germanic word; he was called Brachio, "which means 'bear's whelp' in their language." Brachio the Thuringian had been a huntsman to a lofty Frankish dignitary and had followed him to the Auvergne when he was named governor. While Brachio was on a boar hunt and pursuing a beast of great size, he saw his dogs stopped by a hermit's enclosure in which the boar found refuge. Brachio was impressed by this sign of divine power; the hermit began to talk to him on heavenly matters and one thing led to another; Brachio even learned to read from the golden letters on the images in church.³³ The story is charming, and well designed to show that the road from barbarous paganism to sanctity could be traversed in less than a generation.

Enough examples of Gregory's manner have now been surveyed to suggest the frustrations that accompany anyone who goes looking for aliens in the *Histories*. Gregory's actors usually bear labels; they come from a city or have a nationality. But Gregory is hardly every concerned to spell out which ones he considers insiders and which are not. Typically, the word "outsider," *extraneus*, occurs only in reference, not to a foreigner, but to someone whose claims to belonging to the Frankish royal family were disputed (6.24; 7.27). Gregory has the ability to provide ethnic geography; he does so very competently in Book II, in reference to a moment about 100 years earlier than when he was writing (2.9). For his own time, however, he is silent. The modern

reader can figure out where the Saxons, Swabians, Huns, and others are located only by combining the scattered evidence Gregory furnishes with information from elsewhere.

Until recently, it was customary to call Gregory's work "The History of the Franks," as Thorpe still does; but nothing was farther from the author's thoughts than to place any ethnic group at the centre of his narrative.³⁴ To that extent, Gregory is not typical of early mediaeval historians. One has only to think of Bede, whose own title adverts to the English people, *gens Anglorum*, as being his proper subject. Bede's world is considerably narrower than Gregory's and contains neat ethnic and linguistic compartments. There is an accursed people, namely the Britons, who committed the collective crime of trying to keep the English from knowledge of the true God. There are kindly foreigners, namely the Irish, whose conspicuous good works in missionizing the English were ultimately rewarded by their being won to the true Easter.³⁵ Bede tells of an English king who tired of the bishop from Gaul whom he had welcomed but whose foreign tongue he could not understand, as well as of a young English clergyman who got a chance to shine precociously by acting as interpreter at an important council.³⁶ Bede, unlike Gregory, has a continuing theme -- the conversion of the English to Roman Catholicism; around this core, much other material is classified and categorized in ways that are more familiar to modern tastes than Gregory's piling up of details.

Nevertheless, even a historian lacking a theme comparable to Bede's was able to take a much more positive approach to nationality than Gregory. The author I have in mind is the anonymous chronicler who is conventionally called Fredegar. Fredegar lived two or three generations later than Gregory, whose *Histories* he both summarized and continued into the seventh century. He is the first historian who can appropriately be called Frankish.³⁷ Fredegar goes out of his way to sketch the earliest origins not only of the Franks but also of the Burgundians and the Lombards. Not that he gets them right, of course. According to him, the Franks were descended from the Phrygians who populated Troy and fought the Greeks in the Trojan War.³⁸ The historicity of such legends is an incidental detail. What matters is that an ethnic group acquires precision and definition, at least in writing, for a literate audience, by being supplied with a circumstantial origin legend. The Jews had such a legend, so did the Romans. Now, with Fredegar, the prominent denizens of Gaul and Italy were also provided with their written badges of ethnic legitimacy. One consequence of this enrichment is that overt partisanship becomes possible. In Fredegar's language, the phrase "barbarian manner" means "sneak attack."

The Lombards should rightfully be paying tribute to the Franks, and so should the Saxons; the Gascons had the nasty habit of being unruly and needed to be repressed by Frankish armed force; the Bretons also had to be called to order.³⁹ Border conflicts of this kind often occur in Gregory's *Histories*; they were not a seventh-century novelty. What is novel, by comparison with Gregory, is Fredegar's adoption of an overtly Frankish stance; he is the native who surveys the turbulent foreigners along his borders, deplors the frequency with which they break their word, and keeps count of their transgressions. Fredegar's partisanship is familiar and predictable. The oddity is Gregory's reticence.

How can Gregory be accounted for? What can his treatment of ethnicity disclose about the peculiar world that he lived in and vividly observed? Half-way through Book I of the *Histories* Gregory narrows his focus to Christian Gaul and, to all intents, he keeps to this geographical and religious perspective. He never comments on his point of view; his narrative is full of kings, queens, and other laymen; but his geographical limits are firm, and his outlook is invariably that of a Christian moralist. Gregory does not see a purposeful divine hand in history -- the kind of Almighty Providence that Bede saw guiding the English people to Christianity. The more haphazard providence that Gregory rarely tires of recording is that which is manifested in whatever justice is perceptible here below, as well as in the miracles performed by the saints at their shrines or by the few holy men that the land was blessed with. Gregory does not write ecclesiastical history; the corporate life of the church is of no more concern to him than is any other collective theme. Gregory cares above all for the way persons and groups behave, what they actually do; whenever he can, he portrays their conduct with stark realism, even adjusting the facts provided only that the scene stands out vividly before the mind's eye. Within his limited geographical focus, Gregory sees his actors as being immediate to God, to be portrayed in the light of eternity, from an Olympian perspective. To the Almighty, no one is a foreigner except those who choose to separate themselves from Him. Pagan Saxons can behave well and receive the reward their conduct merits; heretical Goths cannot hope to find civil order until they abandon their perverse and evidently false belief. For the rest, ethnicity is just a matter of identifying labels, of no interest in itself; language and national customs are trivial details, to be disregarded wherever possible. The world is populated simply by men and women, leading their ever fascinating lives in the sight of God.

There may have been down-to-earth reasons for Gregory to adopt this aus-

terely cosmopolitan outlook. In our textbooks, as in any comprehensive account of Gregory's age, the most fateful incidents consist of Justinian's conquest of Italy and his forceful imposition upon the Papacy of a doctrinal compromise (technically called the condemnation of the Three Chapters). We look in vain in Gregory's narrative for these two occurrences.⁴⁰ Justinian is named only in reference to his death; his western conquests are sketchily noted after the fact but never itemized or assessed; his religious policy, which produced a damaging schism in the Latin church, is buried in total silence.⁴¹ It is hard to believe that Gregory's omission of these obvious subjects is other than conscious and deliberate; neither event was to his taste. What is more, since they involved the Roman emperor and the Roman pope in actions that he wholly repudiated, they challenged Gregory's own sense of identity. Among all the labels he uses, the conspicuous absentee is the most natural one, the one that ought automatically to accompany the senatorial title that Gregory willingly assumes. Senatorial, yes; Roman, no. Gregory speaks for his place and time precisely by refusing to espouse the ethnic identity that he had the most historic reason to assume. No longer Roman but not yet a Frank, he found in his faith and its principles of conduct a position that was adequate for a portrayal of his surroundings -- a world in which all men were neither insiders nor outsiders but merely potential citizens in God's kingdom.

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NOTES

This paper originated at the Fourth Annual International Colloquium on Mediaeval Civilization held at Scarborough College, University of Toronto, January 1981. The theme of the Colloquium was "Travellers, Traders and For-eigners: The Mediaeval View of the Outsider."

In order to limit annotation, simple references to the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours are indicated by book and chapter numbers set in parentheses within the text. I refer to the edition of Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum*, I (2nd ed.,

Hannover 1937-52).

¹ Tr. Lewis Thorpe, *Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1974) 587. Cited hereafter as Thorpe.

² Gregory does portray the envoys of a usurper approaching a legitimate Merovingian "cum virgis consecratis iuxta ritum Francorum" (7.32) -- a specialized custom associated with diplomatic relations. A reader of the *Histories* tends to infer that there was something characteristically Frankish about splitting a man's head open with an axe (2.27; 7.14; etc.), but Gregory never spells out that this mode of killing was ethnically specific (cf. the death of an early Roman king in Livy I. 40. 5-7).

³ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London 1978) 104-5; G. Bernard Hughes, "The Old English Banquet," *Country Life* 117 (1955) 473-75. Instead of going to an adjoining room, the diners might stand at the sides of the hall or great chamber. The English term for this ritual, and the accompanying collation, was "void"; French "dessert" replaced it in the later 17th century. Characteristically, the noun "voider" denoted both a receptacle for fragments cleared from a dining table and a tray for distributing sweetmeats; see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "voider," 3a. and d.

⁴ The hagiographic writings of Gregory to be cited here and later are ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH, Script. Rer. Merov.*, I, pt. 2 (Hannover 1885). Barbarian as a synonym for soldier: *Hist.* 4. 48; *Virtutes S. Iuliani* 23, 44; *In Gloria Martyrum* 59. As pagan: *Hist.* 3.15; 7.29, *Virt. S. Iul.* 40. As Franks: *Hist.* 2.32; 4.35.

⁵ In *Lex Burgundionum*, *barbarus* casually refers to Burgundians, as in *Lex Salica* to Franks (both codes belong to the early 6th century). Their usage contrasts to that of Ostrogothic Italy, chiefly illustrated by Cassiodorus, where *barbarus* in reference to Goths was deliberately avoided. Gregory's contemporary, the poet Venantius Fortunatus, is not only neutral but even applies the term to persons whom he praised. See Lieven van Acker, "Barbarus und seine Ableitungen im Mittellatein," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 47 (1965) 125-40.

⁶ Many Gallo-Romans were given Germanic names, but virtually no Frank assumed a Roman one; see Godefroid Kurth, "*Francia et Francus*," in Kurth, *Etudes franques*, 2 vols. (Paris 1919) I, 126-29. As a result, Claudius was almost certainly Gallo-Roman (Kurth's own conclusion, p. 127).

⁷ I provide a more literal translation than Thorpe (at n. 1) 410. For

the beginning of this affair, *Hist.* 7.21-22.

⁸ Cf. *Hist.* 6.45, where *auspicia* refers to the breaking of the axle of a carriage.

⁹ *Hist.* 8.31; Thorpe (at. n. 1) 464.

¹⁰ The chronology of alcoholic distillation does not seem to be authoritatively established. I follow Alexis Lichine, *Lichine's Encyclopedia of Wines and Spirits* (3rd ed., London 1975) 6. A vaguer account occurs in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., *Macropaedia*, 5 (1974) 901; e.g., it admits the making of whisky in Ireland by 1100 and ascribes no special role to the Arabs. On absinthe, Michael R. Marrus, "Social Drinking in the *Belle époque*," *Journal of Social History* 7 (1974) 124-26 (I owe personal thanks to Professor Marrus, my friend and colleague in Toronto).

¹¹ Gabriel Monod, *Etudes critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne*, I (Paris 1872) 25-30.

¹² Karl Friedrich Stroheker, "Die Senatoren bei Gregor von Tours," in Stroheker, *Germanentum and Spätantike* (Zurich and Stuttgart 1965) 192-206.

¹³ The most convenient edition of Procopius is by J.B. Dewing in the Loeb Classical Library. For purposes of comparison, the only possible candidate in Latin is Jordanes, who is in a completely different class. Other Greeks than Procopius might enter into contention if comparisons of this sort deserved to be pressed very far.

¹⁴ *Hist. praefatio*; 2. *praefatio*. In the general preface, Gregory begs the question why current events need to be written down; he is more intent on regretting the lack of qualified authors and stressing his own shortcomings. His tacit implication seems to be that to commemorate ("*gesta praesentia promulgare in paginis*") is also to interpret, by spelling out who were the *flagitiosi* and who the *recte viventes*; this was the urgent task that obliged him to undertake authorship.

¹⁵ Thorpe (at n. 1) 433, "Gallo-Roman" as a language. Gregory's word is "Latin."

¹⁶ *In Gloria Martyrum* 25.

¹⁷ Bodegisel illustrates the anthroponymic practice mentioned in n. 6. Although his name and his father's (Mummolus) are Germanic, he is almost certainly Gallo-Roman because distinguished by Gregory from "Grippe Francus."

¹⁸ Thorpe (at n. 1) 321, slightly altered.

¹⁹ *Hist.* 4.13, 35; *Vitae Patrum* 4.3; 6.4.

²⁰ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* 1.1, ed. Charles Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford 1896) I, 11.

²¹ Concerning Syrians, cf. *Hist.* 7.31 and 10.26 (a Syrian becomes bishop of Paris). Salvian *De Gubernatione Dei* 4.69, attests to crowds of Syrian merchants in fifth-century Gaul. The evidence for Jews in Gaul in the same century and the next is listed in Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'Empire romain*, 2 vols. (1914; repr., New York n.d.) I, 184-86.

²² Thorpe (at n. 1) 485.

²³ In the previous century, Sidonius Apollinaris praised an aristocratic friend of his for having elevated the Latin of his schoolmates from a provincial to a metropolitan level (*Epistolae* III.3.2).

²⁴ Thorpe (at n. 1) 236.

²⁵ The most distant are the Persarmenians, whose dialogues with Persian envoys are confidently reported in direct discourse, *Hist.* 4.40.

²⁶ Quotations from Thorpe (at n. 1) 209-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 219, 513.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 468.

²⁹ *Hist.* 4.4 (Thorpe, p. 199, "as their habit is in Brittany," translates Gregory's *ex more*, i.e., a general burial custom not peculiar to Brittany); 4.20; 5.26, 29, 31, 40, 49; 8.32; 9.18, 24; 10.9. The interest of these passages for political behaviour is very great. Cf. the political conditions portrayed in Bede, *H.E.* 2.5, 9, 12, 15, 20; 3.1, 14, 18, 24; 4.16, 21-22.

³⁰ Herwig Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten* (2nd ed., Munich 1980) 103-5, 296. Their history in the fourth century is closely associated with that of the Goths, but Wolfram denies an ethnic connection. His statement that the Taifals in Poitou were subjects of the Visigoths of Toulouse is based on political geography alone; there is no explicit evidence of Visigothic relations with them.

³¹ Thorpe (at n. 1) 445, slightly altered.

³² Some possible connections between Lombards, the Moselle valley, and Limoges can be made by looking into the biography of Vulfoaic's abbot, Aradius (*Hist.* 10.29; *Vitae Patrum* 17). He had been in the household of King Theudebert I and was guided to monastic life by the saintly bishop Nicetius of Trier, who corresponded with a Lombard queen. See Eugen Ewig, *Trier in Merowingerreich* (Trier 1954) 100.

³³ *Vitae Patrum* 12.2. Gregory's apparent disregard of language gives value to a gloss in another hagiographic work of his, *Virtutes S. Martini* 4.6, "composition due to the fisc, which they (*illi*) call 'fretum'." The "they" in this case as well as Brachio's speaks volumes for Gregory's otherwise muted sense of the otherness of the Franks.

³⁴ The new *Monumenta* edition of Gregory (by Krusch and Levison) restored Gregory's own title *Historiarum libri X* (10.31 no. 19). To be sure, *Historia Francorum* is old; it first occurs in the Carolingian class of manuscripts, by which time the idea of "national" histories had become familiar (e.g., from Isidore, Bede, and possibly Jordanes). Gregory seems to have used "histories" in the classical sense of a narrative of contemporary events, as distinct from an account of ancient times, to which the term "annals" applied (the traditional difference is summarized in Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* I.44.4). There also is reason to wonder whether a classical "history," such as the lost ones mentioned in 2.8-9, may have influenced the year-by-year structure of Gregory's narrative in Books V-X.

³⁵ On the British, Bede *H.E.* 1.10, 14, 22, 34; 2.2, 20; for the essential themes about the Irish, *ibid.* 3.4; 5.22 (explicit contrast to the British).

³⁶ Bede *H.E.* 3.7, 25. The foreign bishop in whose name the young Englishman (Wilfrid) spoke was none other than the one of whom the king had tired.

³⁷ J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Fredegar and the History of France," in Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (New York 1962) 71-94. On his date and against the theory of multiple authorship, Walter Goffart, "The Fredegar Problem Reconsidered," *Speculum* 38 (1963) 206-41, independently confirmed on grounds of language by Alvar Erikson, "The Problem of Authorship in the Chronicle of Fredegar," *Eranos* 63 (1965) 47-76. I am puzzled by Professor Wallace-Hadrill's opinion that Fredegar would have considered himself a *Romanus* (p. 83).

³⁸ Fredegar *Chronicon* 2.4-8; 3.2 (Franks); 2.46 (Burgundians); 3.65 (Lombards), ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH, Script. Rer. Merov.* II (Hannover 1888) 45-47, 93, 68, 110.

³⁹ Fredegar *Chron.* 4.17, 37 (*rito barbaro*); 4.45 (Lombards); 4.74 (Saxons); 4.21, 57, 78 (Gascons); 4.78 (Bretons), ed. Krusch, pp. 127, 138, 143-44, 158, 129, 149, 159-61, 160.

⁴⁰ On the tacit influence of these events on Gregory and historians like him, see Walter Goffart, "Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981) 300-1.

⁴¹ *Hist.* 4.40 (Justinian's death incidental to his nephew's accession); 2.3 (conquest of the Vandals, long anticipating chronological order); 3.32 and 4.9 (Italy; as far as one can tell, imperial forces controlled Italy, were attacked by Franks, and finally prevailed against Frankish invaders; the only reference to Belisarius, as a defeated general, is in 3.32); 4.8 (expedition to Spain; the reference of Thorpe [at n. 1] 202, to Justinian is not in Gregory).