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The *pauperes* in the ‘Libri Historiarum’ of Gregory of Tours

Some Case Studies *

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on specific case studies concerning the representation of the figure of the poor in bishop Gregory of Tours’ ‘Libri Historiarum’. The analysis of this source demonstrates how the needy, although on the edge of society, nevertheless constituted a significant spiritual resource for those who wanted to ensure the purification from their sins through alms, especially the richest. This constituted a dynamics of reciprocal remuneration through which, on the one hand, the suffering of the indigent was made less arduous by the charity of the *divites*; on the other hand, the *pauperes* themselves were believed to act in favour of their earthly benefactors in the afterlife. Although certainly marginal figures, the poor were not, therefore, completely excluded from Merovingian society in the sixth century. Rather, in the Gaul of the ‘Libri Historiarum’, an attempt was made to offer them adequate assistance thanks to the concrete measures taken by those who, whether lay or ecclesiastical, recognised, as Peter Brown has pointed out, the figure of Christ in every needy. Such benefactors were able to offer help to those who extended their hands to receive alms. At the same time, they earned a credit for the salvation of their souls to enter the kingdom of heaven. The different social function of the poor, as illustrated by Gregory of Tours, finds a full correspondence in the theological and social vision of other illustrious Christian authors of the sixth century, such as bishop Caesarius of Arles and, above all, Pope Gregory the Great. These maintained that, according to divine providence, the inferior pay respect to the superior and the superior show benevolence towards the inferior, thus creating a single concordant harmony. The paper, therefore, highlights the different social functions of *pauperes* both by studying some specific figures of indigents and by examining the ecclesiastical mentality concerning the general question of poverty and its effects on marginalisation.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the logic of Christian preaching was to encourage the rich to reach out to the poor in such a way as to join the very top of society to the very bottom. In this way, Christianity could be seen as vertically as well as horizontally all inclusive [...]. Top and bottom – the very rich and the very poor – faced each other in a one-to-one relationship in which all the intermediate gradations of society had been elided ¹.

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¹ PETER BROWN, *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD*, Princeton – Oxford 2012, p. 78.

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Peter Brown thus effectively summarises the dual mechanism put in place by charity, capable of bringing the highest echelons of society into dialogue with the humblest. In this way, a virtuous horizontal bond encompassed every member of the faithful, in particular recovering the excluded, the marginalised, making them effectively part of the body of the church. At the same time, also, a profound spiritual value was attributed to the alms bestowed in favour of the most needy, alms that projected the relations of a material and economic nature that existed between *divites* and *pauperes* into a higher spiritual dimension. The early Medieval church, moreover, as its patrimony grew significantly became the heart of a ‘redistributive process’ of the economic resources². In dealing with the theme of poverty in the Merovingian age, and more specifically in outlining the image of the poor as it emerges from the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’ written by Gregory, bishop of Tours from 573 to 594, we can preliminarily ask ourselves, on the basis of Brown’s reflection, to what extent those who appear weaker, defenseless, apparently neglected by society, were involved or not in the dynamics of Gallic society in the fifth and sixth centuries, who their interlocutors were and whether they were also solicitous in taking care of their needs. The aim here is not to reconstruct the system of assistance in its entirety (the *matriculae* and the *xenodochia*³), put in place by the church in favour of the poor, but to observe some specific case studies that make it possible to point out the attention Gregory paid to the *pauperes*. We want to understand how a high-ranking bishop observed the often indistinct mass of the most needy, and how he interpreted the dynamics of the relations that were interwoven between the highest and lowest spheres of society in sixth-century Gaul. In the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’, in particular, Gregory narrates about *reges*, *episcopi* and other *potentes* who had significant contact with the poor.

Gregory, for example, praises the *virtutes* of the *dux* Chrodin, a man of great virtue and piety, devoted to almsgiving, who supported many initiatives to help the most needy, also with the aim of achieving eternal salvation. “These are for the church, he would say. They must be used to relieve the needs of the poor. They will gain me grace in the eyes of God”⁴: the *pauperes* are, therefore, considered to be an instrument with

² On this theme, see IAN WOOD, *The Christian Economy of the Early Medieval West. Towards a Temple Society*, Binghamton (NY) 2022.

³ Cf. ROSALBA ARCURI, *Modelli di evergetismo regale nella Gallia tardoantica. L’istituzione di Xenodochia pauperibus et peregrinis tra VI e VII secolo*, in: ROSALIA MARINO et al. (eds.), *Poveri ammalati e ammalati poveri. Dinamiche socio-economiche, trasformazioni culturali e misure assistenziali nell’Occidente romano in età tardoantica. Atti del Convegno di Studi* (Palermo, 13–15 ottobre 2005), Catania 2006, pp. 197–225; GIULIANA ALBINI, *Poveri e povertà nel Medioevo*, Rome 2016, pp. 157–167; PEREGRINE HORDEN, *Public Health, Hospitals, and Charity*, in: BONNIE EFFROS – ISABEL MOREIRA (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*, New York 2020, pp. 299–319, here pp. 303–315. In general, see SARA HANSELL MACGONAGLE, *The Poor in Gregory of Tours. A Study of the Attitude of Merovingian Society Towards the Poor, As Reflected in the Literature of the Time*, New York 1936.

⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH – WILHELM LEVISON (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/1), Hannover 1951, VI.20 (for the translation, see Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, ed. LEWIS THORPE [Penguin Classics], London 1974, p. 350; hereafter, only the page will be

which a *vir magnifice bonitatis et pietatis* like Chrodin could use his wealth not in order to obtain material benefits but a much greater reward, namely the heavenly prize that he would have merited thanks to the intercession of the poor. The latter, who lacked all means, proved, instead, to be a precious asset for those who wished to ensure purification from all sin through alms. This was a mechanism of reciprocal retribution which, in life, ensured that the suffering of the poor was alleviated by the charity of the *divites*, while in the afterlife the *pauperes* themselves would act in favour of their earthly benefactors, a mechanism, therefore, which closely refers to a concept expressed by Caesarius of Arles in one of his sermons:

God allowed poor people to be in the world in order that every man might have the means of redeeming his sins. If there were no poor, no one would give alms and no one would receive pardon. God could have made all men rich, but He wanted to assist us through the misery of the poor. Thus, the poor by patience and the rich by almsgiving may merit the grace of God [...]. What comparison is there, brother? You give the poor a coin and receive a kingdom from Christ; you bestow a mouthful and are given eternal life; you offer clothes and Christ grants you the forgiveness of your sins. Therefore, let us not despise the poor, brethren, but let us desire them all the more and of our own accord hasten to lavish ourselves upon them.⁵

Eternal reward and spiritual purification could be obtained through the concrete, tangible charity of alms, which were not, however, the only means of bringing relief to those in need. Miracles, in fact, also play a significant role, although, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter, the thaumaturgical dimension of the 'Libri Historiarum' will be different from that found in the vast hagiographic collection created by Gregory with the 'Libri octo Miraculorum'.

2. THE WIFE OF NAMATIUS, PAPIANILLA AND RADEGUND

The analysis of an unusual circumstance can be an interesting starting point. It could also have been a needy person who, paradoxically, erroneously gave charity to someone who was not poor. This is what happened to the wife of the eighth bishop of Clermont, Namatius, who lived in the middle of the fifth century. While she was busy supervising the creation of some frescoes in a church, she was mistaken by a *quidam pauper* for "one of the needy" because of her modest clothes and advanced age; therefore this man "produced a piece of bread, put it in her lap and went on his way. She did not scorn the gift of this poor man, who had not understood who she was. She took it, and thanked him, and put it on one side."⁶ The woman's reaction was anything

indicated, in brackets, relating to the Thorpe's translation). See Gregorius (3), in: LUCE PIETRI – MARC HEIJMANS (eds.), *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire, IV. Prosopographie de la Gaule chrétienne* (314–614), vol. 1: A–H, Paris 2013, pp. 915–954.

⁵ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons au peuple*, II (Sermons 21–55), ed. MARIE-JOSÉ DELAGE (SC 243), Paris 1978, XXV.2 (for the translation see Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, I: [1–80], ed. MARY MAGDELEINE MUELLER (Fathers of the Church 31), Washington (D.C.) 1956, p. 129).

⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), II.17 (THORPE, p. 132).

but angry, as she did not feel offended and even appreciated the gesture, and she “ate it instead of her other food and each day she received a blessing from it until it was all eaten up.”⁷ The wife of Namatius, “distinguished for her piety and humility [...] was a model of an episcopal partner”⁸, and thus she shared a life of humility and modesty with her husband and was a good example of Christian self-effacement⁹. Gregory’s flattering opinion of her was certainly influenced by the love of poverty and the spiritual closeness to this humble condition of life demonstrated by the *coniux* of the *episcopus* of Clermont¹⁰.

This episode also makes it possible to highlight certain stereotypes about the figure of the *pauper*, who could be recognised, independently of his real identity, by his modest clothes: “in her black dress” and “already far advanced in age”¹¹, in this way Gregory of Tours describes the woman, who probably was not used to dressing in a flashy manner. The poor man had been misled by the church environment, in which he had met the supposed beggar woman, whose appearance had definitely led him to believe that she was in the same state of poverty as himself. This man had certainly made a great gesture of solidarity to her, whom he considered to be of his own marginal status, an act of charity that Namatius’s wife welcomed as a blessing and not as an insult. These are stereotypes – embedded in the mentality of the time in which the elderly continued to be a typical figure of the beggar¹² – from which neither the protagonists of the episode nor Gregory manage to escape. This episode also testifies to the spiritual power that, as the woman’s behaviour suggests, was attributed to the poor man, the image of Christ¹³.

Another woman, Papianilla, daughter of emperor Avitus and wife of Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont, behaved quite differently from Namatius’s wife. She did not hesitate to blame her husband for his prodigality towards the poor, to whom he had given silver vases: “When she found out what he had done, she used to grumble at him; then he would buy the silver vessels back from the poor folk and bring them

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ GARY MACY, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination. Female Clergy in the Medieval West*, New York – Oxford 2008, pp. 55–56; cf. BRIAN BRENNAN, “Episcopae”. Bishops’ Wives Viewed in Sixth-Century Gaul, in: *Church History* 54, 1985, pp. 311–323, here pp. 317–318.

⁹ FRANCA ELA CONSOLINO, Gregorio di Tours, Venanzio Fortunato e le mogli dei vescovi in Gallia, in: ROSSANA BARCELLONA – TERESA SARDELLA (eds.), *Munera amicitiae. Studi di storia e cultura sulla Tarda Antichità offerti a Salvatore Pricoco*, Soveria Mannelli 2003, pp. 75–93, here p. 82.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 92: “in tutta l’opera di Gregorio di positivo c’è solo il ritratto della moglie di Namazio di Clermont.”

¹¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), II. 17 (THORPE, p. 132). On women and old age, see CARMELINA URSO, ‘Vetustas’, ‘anus’ e ‘vetulae’ nel Medioevo, in: *Studi Storici* 53, 2012, pp. 817–854.

¹² VALERIO NERI, *I marginali nell’Occidente tardoantico. Poveri, ‘infames’ e criminali nella nascente società cristiana*, Bari 1998, p. 61.

¹³ See below, note 90.

home again.”¹⁴ Being invested with the office of bishop, a duty which included, among other pastoral tasks, that of providing for the needs of the weakest, did not, however, necessarily require Sidonius and his wife to abdicate their privileged position as members of the Gallo-Roman elite. Perhaps the circumstance that Sidonius had given these silver vases as alms was, in Papianilla's mind, a damage to their social image rather than an economic problem, given Sidonius's willingness to pay the equivalent value of these precious objects in coins if, in accordance with his wife's wishes, they were returned to his family. Sidonius, then, albeit indirectly, had donated money to the needy. In this episode, Sidonius does not seem to have completely abandoned his aristocratic attitude, even though he had devoted his life to the service of God, as his adversaries did not fail to accuse him of despising the *pauperes Christi*¹⁵. Sidonius, on the contrary, was actually aware of the importance of charity, also with regard to the heavenly reward that the souls of benefactors would receive in heaven¹⁶.

Papianilla's brother Ecdicius paid, instead, great attention to the needs of the poor. In the seventies of the fifth century, he brought help to more than four thousand people affected by a severe famine, a generosity that did not take long to receive a well-deserved spiritual reward as we read in the 'Libri Historiarum': "a voice was heard from Heaven, saying to him: Ecdicius, Ecdicius, because you have done this thing you and your descendants shall never lack food; for you have obeyed my word and by feeding the poor you have stayed my hunger, too.”¹⁷ Here, the overlap between the image of the poor man and that of Christ is highlighted, a compelling parallel analysed in depth by Peter Brown, also with regard to the testimony of Gregory of Tours, a subject we will return to later on. It is worth noting here that Gregory recalls that both Sidonius Apollinaris (*ex senatoribus primis*) and Ecdicius (*quidam ex senatoribus*)¹⁸ belonged to the senatorial rank, in order to highlight the moral qualities that distinguished this class, which was closely linked to the Gallo-Roman church, and from which the bishop of Tours himself descended¹⁹. This was a social class which,

¹⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), II.22 (THORPE, p. 134); see JILL HARRIES, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome. AD 407–485*, Oxford 1994, pp. 205, 221; LUCIANA FURBETTA, *Sidonio Apollinare nei Libri Historiarum di Gregorio di Tours*, in: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome-Moyen Âge* 127, 2015, pp. 355–364, here p. 357.

¹⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Lettres (Livres VI–IX)*, ed. ANDRÉ LOYEN (Collection des universités de France Série latine – Collection Budé 198), Paris 1970, VII.9.14.

¹⁶ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Lettres (Livres I–V)*, ed. ANDRÉ LOYEN (Collection des universités de France Série latine – Collection Budé 199), Paris 1970, IV.2.3.

¹⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), II.24 (THORPE, p. 138); on this episode, cf. RALPH W. MATHISEN, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul. Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition*, Austin 1993, p. 53; HARRIES, *Sidonius Apollinaris* (as note 14), p. 31; FILOMENA GIANNOTTI, *L'epistola III 3 di Sidonio Apollinare fra encomio di Ecdicio e misobarbarismo*, in: *Romanobarbarica* 17, 2000–2002, pp. 161–182, here p. 163.

¹⁸ Cf. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), II.22 and 24.

¹⁹ See MARTIN HEINZELMANN, *Gregory of Tours. History and Society in the Sixth Century*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 11–22.

although distant from the *pauperes*, was obliged to interact through the distribution of alms with the marginal sections of society, without, however, losing its own elitist identity. Giving alms to the poor was a characteristic feature of senators. Gregory writes how the spread of Christian faith had encountered some difficulties in Bourges in the third century, which were, however, brilliantly overcome thanks to the generosity of a *senator*, Leocadius (from whose family Gregory's maternal grandmother, Leocadia, came), who had coped with a lack of attention to the needs of Christians²⁰. The bishops, therefore, did not yet enjoy the *auctoritas* and material resources that they would later make available to their faithful, especially the most needy, who evidently, however, in the third century could count on the support of those aristocrats who were starting to come to faith in Christ.

Among the female figures mentioned in the 'Libri Historiarum' regarding the variegated world of the *pauperes*, it is worth remembering queen Radegund, wife of Chlothar I (511–561), who "turned to God, took the habit of a religious and built a nunnery for herself in Poitiers. She was famous for her prayers, her vigils and her charities, and she became so well known that the common people looked upon her as a saint."²¹ The case of this saintly queen is therefore exemplary²². Freed from all matrimonial ties, she managed to satisfy her desire to become a nun and, despite her high social prestige, she did not want to become abbess of the monastery of the Holy Cross of Poitiers, leaving this task to her spiritual daughter, Agnes²³.

Three women, then, belonged to the highest strata of fifth- and sixth-century Gallic society, each of whom demonstrated significant interaction with the world of the marginalised. The first, the nameless wife of Namatius, recognised a profound spiritual richness in the beggar who offered her charity, the third, Radegund, dedicated her life to God and the weakest, while the second, Papianilla, though not at all moved by a merciful spirit, had only the function of pushing her husband to perform charitable acts. Radegund, in particular, recognises her monastic choice as the best way to bring help to her neighbour, as she could not fully express her commitment as *ancilla Dei* when she was still united in marriage to Chlothar I. The gallery of female characters, immortalised in the 'Libri Historiarum', and linked to the theme of poverty,

²⁰ Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X (as note 4), I.31, and see I.44, about the bishop of senatorial origin, Urbicus of Clermont, who gave alms; in contrast to Urbicus, we read in IV.35 that Eufasius, "son of the late Evodius, who was of a senatorial family [...] very rarely gave refreshment to the poor" (THORPE, p. 229).

²¹ Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X (as note 4), III.7 (THORPE, pp. 168–169); see also IX.42.

²² See, more recently, CARMELINA URSO, Radegonda, regina e ancilla Dei, in: ELENA FRASCA (ed.), Il valore e la virtù. Studi in onore di Silvana Raffaele, Acireale – Rome 2019, pp. 421–432; DONATELLA MANZOLI, Per il "dossier" agiografico di santa Radegonda, in: Hagiographica 28, 2021, pp. 1–40. Clotild, wife of Clovis, and Ingoberg, wife of Charibert I (561–567), are also remembered for their care for the poor and prodigality in giving alms; see, respectively, Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X (as note 4), III.18 and IX.26.

²³ Baudonivia, De vita sanctae Radegundis liber II, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. II), Hannover 1888, 8.

does not end here. As will be seen in the next chapter, another Merovingian queen, Fredegund, managed to convince her husband to perform some charity in reparation for the grave sins he had committed, but without achieving the desired result; on the contrary, a Byzantine empress, Sophia (as discussed in the fourth chapter), appears in Gregory’s eyes as the ‘worthy’ consort of an extremely avaricious sovereign and enemy of the poor.

3. THE MEROVINGIAN REGES AND THE PAUPERES. BETWEEN CHARITY AND VIOLENCE

The ‘Libri Historiarum’ report some episodes that are not quite as edifying as that of Ecdicius has been. There was no lack of occasions when violence and abuse were perpetrated against the most needy, crimes that did not go unpunished, as the soldiers of the Austrasian king Theuderic I (511–534) experienced. When his *exercitus* sacked the basilica of St Julian at Brioude, without sparing “the possessions of the poor inhabitants which had been put there for safety”, the saint’s chastisement immediately fell upon the *milites*: they began to bite each other with their own teeth and to cry out: “Why do you torture us in this way, holy martyr?”²⁴ This is a thaumaturgical episode in which the *potentia* of the saint²⁵ manifests itself to severely condemn those who had dared both to desecrate church property and to destroy the economic resources intended for the poor. In doing so, those wicked *milites* acted as true *necatores pauperum*, destroying the resources that ecclesiastical bodies, to the extent of one quarter of their wealth, had precisely reserved for the assistance of the poor²⁶.

Theuderic I, in particular, is cited by Gregory in this case concerning his disputes with bishop Desideratus of Verdun, from whom he had taken all his money so as not to allow him to assist the poor. Desideratus was also tortured and imprisoned²⁷, and regained his freedom when Theudebert I (533–548), Theuderic I’s son, rose to power. The bishop then, having heard of Theudebert’s magnanimity, asked to borrow money from him to assist the needy, promising to repay the sum with interest. Seven thousand gold pieces were given to Desideratus, but this was not all that Theudebert I did, because when the bishop offered to repay the debt he had incurred, the king declared

²⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), III.12 (THORPE, p. 172); see LUCE PIETRI, *Prosopographie d’un pèlerinage. Saint-Julien de Brioude (V^e–VI^e siècles)*, in: *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome-Moyen Âge/Temps Modernes* 100, 1988, pp. 23–38, here p. 33.

²⁵ Cf. PETER BROWN, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago 1981, pp. 106–127.

²⁶ In particular, see *Rescriptum beati Gregorii papae ad Augustinum episcopum seu Libellus responsum*, ed. VALERIA MATTALONI (Edizione Nazionale dei Testi Mediolatini d’Italia, 43-Serie I, 24), Florence 2017, chapter I.2; cf. FEDERICO MARAZZI, I ‘Patrimonia Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae’ nel Lazio (secoli IV–X). Strutture amministrativa e prassi gestionale, Rome 1998, pp. 65–78.

²⁷ Gregory states that a certain Syrivald denounced the bishop to Theuderic I (*Libri Historiarum* X [as note 4], III.35), but no more detailed information is available (see Desideratus [2], in: PIETRI-HEIJMANS [eds.], *Prosopographie chrétienne* [as note 4], pp. 556–557).

that he had already been rewarded: “I have no need to take this money. It is enough for me that, when you asked that I should make a loan, those who were poor and in dire distress were returned to prosperity.”²⁸ This is an episode that well illustrates Gregory’s favour towards Theudebert I, a “bon roi”²⁹, whose qualities the bishop of Tours did not hesitate to highlight, pointing out how the sovereign ruled “his kingdom justly, respected his bishops, was liberal to the churches, relieved the wants of the poor and distributed many benefits with piety and friendly goodwill.”³⁰ Theudebert I was a ‘good’ king, whose qualities stood out especially when contrasted with his father’s misdeeds³¹, through a mode of comparison that will later return in the plot of the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’ about the contrast between Guntram (561–592), a saint-king, and his half-brother Chilperic I (561–584), described by Gregory as “the Nero and Herod of our time” for his contempt of the church³².

The Merovingian kings, however, were not always as solicitous towards the *pauperes* as Theudebert I had been. Chlothar I had required the clergy to pay one third of their income into the royal coffers, a measure which aroused the firm opposition of the bishop of Tours, Injurious³³. The prelate’s arguments were based on the need to defend the weakest against the abuses of the powerful: “If you have made up your mind to seize what belongs to God, then the Lord will soon take your kingdom away from you”, so threatened Injurious, who further specified the reasons for the divine punishment that would inexorably be meted out to the monarch: “for it is criminal for you, who should be feeding the poor from your own granary, to fill your coffers with the alms which others give to them.”³⁴ Chlothar I, struck by these words, had implored the bishop for forgiveness, fearful “that Saint Martin would punish him for what he

²⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), III.34 (THORPE, p. 191).

²⁹ See MARC REYDELLET, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, Rome 1981, pp. 412–416 (for the quotation, p. 413); ROGER COLLINS, Theodebert I ‘Rex Magnus Francorum’, in: PATRICK WORMALD et al. (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*. Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, Oxford 1983, pp. 7–33.

³⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), III.25 (THORPE, p. 185); cf. ADRIAAN H.B. BREUKELAAR, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul*. The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in their Historical Context, Göttingen 1994, p. 233; IAN WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdoms. 450–751*, London – New York 1994, p. 66.

³¹ Cf. Gregory of Tours, *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/2), Hannover 1885, p. 13, where it is reported, however, that Theuderic I returned what had been stolen by his soldiers. Gregory, therefore, does not report this news in the books in order to highlight the king in an even more negative manner, in a narrative mode that, below, we will find again with regard to the empress Sophia.

³² Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VI.46 (THORPE, p. 379).

³³ Cf. JEAN DURLIAT, *Les finances publiques de Diocletien aux Carolingiens (284–889)*, Sigmaringen 1990, p. 138; JEAN HEUCLIN, *Hommes de Dieu et fonctionnaires du Roi en Gaule du Nord du V^e au IX^e siècle (348–817)*, Villeneuve-d’Ascq 1998, pp. 74–75; STEFAN ESDERS, *Gallie Politics in the Sixth Century*, in: ALEXANDER CALLANDER MURRAY (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, Leiden – Boston 2015, pp. 427–461, here p. 432.

³⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.2 (THORPE, p. 197).

had done.”³⁵ It was inevitable for Gregory of Tours – guardian of the hagiographic memory of Saint Martin – to corroborate the *auctoritas* exercised on the *rex* by his predecessor Injurious through a reference to the patron saint. This case was in contrast to that of Desideratus, who had been able to restore the fortunes of his city only thanks to the munificence of Theudebert I; Injurious, instead, had brought the weight of his episcopal office to limit the tax burden imposed by Chlothar I on the churches, since the king also affected the resources the clergy had earmarked for the most needy³⁶. It is useful to remember that several conciliar norms aimed at preserving the resources to be allocated to the assistance of the poor from undue interference by the laity³⁷.

Another king, Chilperic I, of whom Gregory has left us a rather negative portrait, complained that the wealth of the church was far greater than that at his disposal³⁸. Chilperic, in particular, was involved in a dramatic situation, that of the dysentery epidemic that had afflicted Gaul in 580³⁹, an epidemic that did not spare two of his sons, little Dagobert and another named Chlodobert, who both died. In despair, Chilperic’s wife, Fredegund – on whom Gregory’s judgement is no less severe than on the king himself – had begged her husband to make amends for all their crimes, even going so far as to burn the tax registers because, the queen complained, it was “the tears of paupers”, burdened by their unjust payments, that had caused the evil that had befallen their children⁴⁰. However, the destruction of all fiscal documents and the prohibition of new taxes were not enough for Chilperic to save the lives of his sons. Nevertheless, Gregory writes that, after the mourning, “Chilperic was lavish in giving alms to cathedrals and churches, and to the poor, too.”⁴¹ The abuses against the needy, and as

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See, in general, GREGORY I. HALFOND, *Bishops and the Politics of Patronage in Merovingian Gaul*, Ithaca 2019.

³⁷ See Concilium Agathense, a. 506, in: *Concilia Galliae a. 314–506*, ed. CHARLES MUNIER (CC 148), Turnhout 1963, 4, 7; Concilium Aurelianense, a. 511, in: *Concilia Galliae a. 511–695*, ed. CHARLES DE CLERCQ (CC 148A), Turnhout 1963, 16; Concilium Aurelianense, a. 549, in: *ibid.*, 13, 15, 16; Concilium Arelatense, a. 554, in: *ibid.*, 6; Concilium Turonense, a. 567, in: *ibid.*, 5, 25, 26, 27; Concilium Parisiense, aa. 556–573, in: *ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VI.46.

³⁹ Cf. ALAIN J. STOCLET, *Consilia humana, ops divina, superstitio. Seeking Succor and Solace in Times of Plague, with Particular Reference to Gaul in the Early Middle Ages*, in: LESTER K. LITTLE (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity. The Pandemic of 541–750*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 135–149, here pp. 146–147.

⁴⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.34 (THORPE, p. 297). Cf. NICO DE MICO, *La lucida follia di Fredegunde, regina specchio del suo tempo (dalle Historiae di Gregorio di Tours)*, in: *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 54, 2012, pp. 133–162, here p. 142; GREGORY I. HALFOND, *Sis Quoque Catholicis Religionis Apex. The Ecclesiastical Patronage of Chilperic I and Fredegund*, in: *Church History* 81, 2012, pp. 48–76, here p. 67; ERIN T. DAILEY, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines. Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite*, Leiden – Boston 2015, pp. 133–135.

⁴¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.34 (THORPE, p. 298); see also V.26 about Chilperic I’s pretentious demand that the poor pay a fine for not doing military service, even though the needy were not among the categories called upon to do so. Cf. WALTER GOFFART, *Frankish Mili-*

Fredegund recalled also against widows and orphans, had been expiated at a high price by the royal couple. God, in Gregory's vision of human history, acted effectively in protecting the weakest and punishing the wicked, a strong message that the bishop of Tours delivers to his readers to reinforce the sinister image of Chilperic. His decision to make donations to certain ecclesiastical bodies and for the benefit of the *pauperes* was dictated by Fredegund's openly manifested desire to redeem at least her own soul and that of her consort, since all hope of recovery for their children had been lost⁴². And just as Theuderic I and Clothar I, also Chilperic I had experienced both the power of the saints, who watched over Gaul, and the ability of bishops to deploy their spiritual weapons to defend their interests.

Regarding Chilperic I again, who is the quintessential incarnation of the role of the evil ruler in the 'Libri Historiarum'⁴³, Gregory of Tours contrasts him with Guntram, of whom we read that he "behaved with great kindness to many of his subjects and made considerable grants to the poor."⁴⁴ Guntram, praised as a *bonus sacerdos*⁴⁵, was compared for his charitable attitude⁴⁶ to those *virī Dei* who showed great generosity. In this context, Gregory recalls the following bishops: Avitus of Clermont, who "made his magnanimity clear to all, ruling his flock justly, giving alms to the poor, solace to the widowed and every possible help to the orphaned"⁴⁷; Nicetius of Lyons, "remarkable for his saintliness and chaste in his behaviour", who "gave alms freely"⁴⁸; Tetricus of Langres, who expelled the deacon Lampadius from his church, guilty of stealing goods intended for the most needy⁴⁹; Maurilio, bishop of Cahors, who is praised by Gregory for his commitment in defense of the poor with a verse from the book of Job: "Because I delivered the poor from the hand of the mighty, and him that

tary Duty and the Fate of Roman Taxation, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 16, 2008, p. 181; ALEXANDER CALLANDER MURRAY, *The Merovingian State and Administration in the Times of Gregory of Tours*, in: ID. (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (as note 33), pp. 191–231, here p. 229.

⁴² Another case when Chilperic I showed his hostility towards the poor was the marriage of his daughter Rigunth to the Visigoth Reccared, son of king Leuvigild. The procession that was to accompany the princess from Gaul to Spain in 584 caused much devastation along the way, affecting the poor, who were stripped of their already meagre possessions in order to replenish Rigunth's escort, cf. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VI.45; see ALLEN E. JONES, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul. Strategies and Opportunities for the Non-Elite*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 161–163.

⁴³ See GUY HALSALL, *Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writings of History*, in: KATHLEEN MITCHELL – IAN WOOD (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, Leiden et al. 2002, pp. 337–350.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VII.7 (THORPE, p. 393); cf. ID., *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/2), Hannover 1885, 75.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IX.21.

⁴⁶ See Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VII.40, VIII.3, VIII.30 and IX.20.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.35 (THORPE, p. 230).

⁴⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.36 (THORPE, pp. 230–231).

⁴⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.5.

had none to help him”⁵⁰; Dalmatius of Rodez, “extremely charitable”⁵¹; Eparchius, the recluse of Angoulême, who would donate the “gold or silver [...] offered to him [...] in supplying the needs of the poor or in freeing people from prison”⁵²; a man from Antioch who, as the Armenian bishop Simon reported to Gregory himself, deserved to survive the destruction of the city of Antioch because he was very diligent in giving alms⁵³; Baudinus, sixteenth bishop of Tours, donor of substantial alms for the needy⁵⁴. Thus, Gregory portrays Guntram as a *bonus sacerdos*, a *rex* who, *se benignum exhibens*, cares for his flock of believers⁵⁵, protecting above all the most needy, for whose benefit, therefore, the bishops or those who imitated them can effectively intervene⁵⁶. The poor thus constitute an ‘argument’ to the eyes of Gregory that is certainly useful in extolling the *virtutes* of both a sovereign acting as a priest, as well as for the *episcopi* themselves.

4. AN EMPEROR AND A HERMIT

It is worth noting that Gregory does not limit the examples of virtuous rulers who loved the poor to Gaul only⁵⁷, but also includes the Eastern emperor Tiberius II (578–

⁵⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.42 (THORPE, p. 306); *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. ROBERT WEBER – ROGER GRYSO, Stuttgart 52007, Iob 29.12.

⁵¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.46 (THORPE, p. 312).

⁵² Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VI.8 (THORPE, p. 338); see also VII.1 about Salvius of Albi.

⁵³ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), X.24; see TIM GREENWOOD, Armenia, in: SCOTT FITZGERALD JOHNSON (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford – New York 2012, pp. 115–141, here pp. 115–118.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), X.31. It can be added here that if the poor had their main defenders in the members of the high clergy, it could nevertheless happen that it was a priest, as in the case of Cato of Clermont (IV.11), who made use of the needy to whom he offered his indispensable support in order to show off his authority, with a certain pride, as Gregory stigmatises (see ROBERT GODDING, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne*, Brussels 2001, pp. 41–43, 481); cf. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.6, where Cato declared that he is happy to give alms, and IV.31, where he is praised for his commitment to help the sick affected by an epidemic.

⁵⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IX.30, about a tax exemption, granted by Guntram, in favour of widows, orphans, poor and infirm, see WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* (as note 30), p. 62; HALFOND, *Bishops and the Politics of Patronage* (as note 36), pp. 86, 88.

⁵⁶ Gregory’s positive judgement of Guntram is certainly influenced by the power that the king, between 584 and 585, had wielded directly over Tours, thus restoring tranquillity to the city after the contrasting rule of Chilperic I; see LUCE PIETRI, *La ville de Tours du IV^e au VI^e siècle. Naissance d’une cité chrétienne*, Rome 1983, pp. 265–274; ALEXANDER CALLANDER MURRAY, *The Composition of the Histories of Gregory of Tours and its Bearing on the Political Narrative*, in: ID. (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (as note 33), pp. 61–101, here pp. 92–93.

⁵⁷ About Gregory’s attention to places and peoples outside Gaul see MICHEL-YVES PERRIN, *Grégoire de Tours et l’espace extra-gaulois. Le gallocentrisme grégorien revisité*, in: NANCY GAUTHIER – HENRI GALINIÉ (eds.), *Grégoire de Tours et l’espace gaulois. Actes du congrès international* (Tours, 3–5 novembre 1994), Tours 1997, pp. 35–45.

582) in his work⁵⁸. Appointed Caesar by Justin II in 574, he had immediately shown a marked inclination to perform acts of charity⁵⁹. His conduct – radically different from that of the insane Justin II, “the most avaricious of men, giving nothing to the poor and bleeding his senators dry”⁶⁰, as Gregory blames him – attracted the disapproval of empress Sophia, who accused him of excessive profligacy, to the extent that he had squandered all public resources. The bishop of Tours put a verse from Matthew’s Gospel into Tiberius II’s mouth in the reply he gave to Sophia to counter her insinuations: “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”⁶¹ From this point of view, the many alms given by Tiberius II could be seen as a spiritual investment. Unlike the miserly Justin II, he entrusted his wealth to the poor and poured it into the coffers of the kingdom of heaven for the salvation of his soul. On the one hand, then, Justin is represented in the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’ as an emperor devoid of sense, even heretical, although this piece of information seems to be a stretch by the bishop of Tours in order to present him, as a *contemptor pauperum*, in the worst possible light⁶²; on the other hand, Tiberius II, *hominem iustum, elemosinarium* as well as *virissimum christianum*, contrasts the sinister emperor in the same way as Guntram and Chilperic I contrast each other in Gregory’s plot. Interestingly, the bishop of Tours, in order to highlight Justin’s madness even more, refers to his hatred against the *senatores* and *pauperes*, the former being harmed by the emperor’s greed for their conspicuous income, the latter because they were deprived of alms. Gregory still shows his concern for the senatorial class, who, no less than the poor, suffered serious damage at the hands of an evil and insane ruler. In the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’, therefore, we learn that God’s support for Tiberius II was soon manifested when two enormous treasures were found and distributed to the poor with the usual generosity, indeed with a prodigality full of joy as Gregory points out⁶³.

⁵⁸ Cf. AVERIL CAMERON, The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours, in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 26, 1975, pp. 421–426; WALTER POHL, Creating Cultural Resources for Carolingian Rule. Historians of the Christian Empire, in: C. GANTNER et al. (eds.), *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 15–33, here pp. 28–29; PIA LUCAS, Magnus et Verus Christianus. The Portrayal of Emperor Tiberius II in Gregory of Tours, in: STEFAN ESDERS et al. (eds.), *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Mediterranean World. Revisiting the Sources*, London – New York 2019, pp. 127–139.

⁵⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.40. On the subject of imperial assistance towards the poor cf. ÉVELYNE PATLAGEAN, The Poor, in: GUGLIELMO CAVALLO (ed.), *The Byzantines*, Chicago 1997, pp. 15–42, here pp. 23–25; DIONYSIOS STATHAKOPOULOS, ‘Philoptochos basileus’. Kaiserliche Armenfürsorge zwischen Rhetorik und Realität in Byzanz, in: LUTZ RAPHAEL – HERBERT UERLINGS (eds.), *Zwischen Ausschluss und Solidarität. Modi der Inklusion/Exklusion von Fremden und Armen in Europa seit der Spätantike*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, pp. 165–179.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), IV.40 (THORPE, p. 234).

⁶¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.19 (THORPE, p. 283); Mt 6.20.

⁶² Eastern sources do not mention the heresy of Justin II at all, cf. SIMON T. LOSEBY, Gregory of Tours, Italy, and the Empire, in: MURRAY (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (as note 33), pp. 462–497, here pp. 482–485; LUCAS, Magnus et Verus Christianus (as note 58), pp. 134–139.

⁶³ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), V.19.

Regarding Sophia, Gregory accentuated her image as the 'enemy of the poor'. She had, however, performed several works of charity⁶⁴ and had demonstrated her deep devotion by donating a fragment of the True Cross to the convent of Poitiers founded by Radegund. Gregory reports this case in the 'Libri Historiarum', without, however, mentioning Sophia in any way⁶⁵. But it does not seem plausible that the bishop was unaware that the empress was behind this generous gesture, not least because his close friend Venantius Fortunatus circumstantially attributes the gift of that precious relic precisely to Justin II's wife⁶⁶.

Another example beyond the Franks concerns the Lombards, whose irruption into Gallic territory was prophesied in the seventies of the sixth century by the hermit Hospicius of Nice. The Lombards would come down with all their violence on *civitates septem*, because in such places, as Hospicius asserts in a biblical tone, the

entire populace is without faith, given to perjury, prone to theft, quick to commit murder: and no justice can be seen to flourish among them. They do not pay their tithes, they do not feed the poor, they do not clothe the naked: no hospitality is offered there to strangers, and they are not even given enough to eat⁶⁷.

As the protagonist of this story is a saint, it should be pointed out that there is no reference to the Lombards as enemies of the Catholics, or to their Arianism⁶⁸, as it was the case with other people who came into contact with the Franks, for example the Visigoths⁶⁹. Rather, in the episode in question, Gregory wants to use the Lombards as fearsome enemies to emphasise the severity of God's punishment that, inexorably, would fall on the wicked, on those who, among many evils, were also guilty of not taking care of the poor.

⁶⁴ Cf. ANNE McCLANAN, The Empress Sophia. Authority and Image in an Era of Conflict, in: EAD. (ed.), Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses. Image and Empire, New York – Houndmills 2002, pp. 149–178, here pp. 153–158; DAILEY, Queens, Consorts, Concubines (as note 40), pp. 32–35.

⁶⁵ Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X (as note 4), IX.40; cf. Id., Liber in gloria martyrum (as note 44), 5.

⁶⁶ Venantius Fortunatus, Poèmes, III: Livres IX–XI. Appendice – In laudem sanctae Mariae, ed. MARC REYDELLET (Collection des universités de France Série latine – Collection Budé 374), Paris 2004, Appendix II: Ad Iustinum iuniorem imperatorem et Sophiam Augustos, vv. 55–60.

⁶⁷ Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X (as note 4), VI.6 (THORPE, p. 333); cf. Ps (H) 13.1 and 3; Joel 3.13. See BRIAN BRENNAN, The Relic of the True Cross in the Statecraft of Justin II and Sophia in the West, in: Byzantion 91, 2021, pp. 47–73, here pp. 62–72.

⁶⁸ Cf. STEVEN C. FANNING, Lombard Arianism Reconsidered, in: Speculum 56, 1981, pp. 241–258, here pp. 243–245; WALTER POHL, Gregory of Tours and Contemporary Perceptions of Lombard Italy, in: MITCHELL – WOOD (eds.), The World of Gregory of Tours (as note 43), pp. 131–143, here pp. 131–132.

⁶⁹ See JOHN MOORHEAD, Gregory of Tours on the Arian Kingdoms, in: Studi medievali 36, 1995, pp. 903–915; EDWARD JAMES, Gregory of Tours and "Arianism", in: ANDREW CAIN – NOEL LENSKE (eds.), The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity, Farnham – Burlington (VT) 2009, pp. 327–338.

5. A LOOK AT THE 'LIBRI OCTO MIRACULORUM'

A comparison, albeit schematic, with the 'Libri octo Miraculorum' is certainly helpful in clarifying Gregory's references to the dimension of the miracle in the 'Libri Historiarum'. In this work, divine intervention is manifested either to inflict severe punishment on the *necatores pauperum*, from Theuderic I or Chilperic I for example, or to grant a just spiritual reward, as in the cases of Namatius's wife or that of Tiberius II. Therefore, the miracle, rather than aiming to directly redress the wrongs suffered by the *pauperes*, seems useful to Gregory to draw, precisely from the suffering undergone by the most needy because of wicked rulers, a stern warning to those who dared to offend those who were considered the image of Christ. On the contrary, those who were able to protect the weakest enjoy heavenly protection so that they have even ascended to the glory of the altars. Whether as a necessary punishment or as a deserved reward, this is how the recourse to miracles is justified in the 'Libri Historiarum', so as to exhort the faithful to take care of their neediest sisters and brothers.

In the 'Libri octo Miraculorum', however, some figures also emerge in their individuality. The bishop of Tours pauses his narration on them, whose names have even been handed down in some cases, to describe their physical sufferings, their miserable living conditions and above all the prodigious *miracula* from which they benefited. Some significant episodes can be traced from a reading of the 'Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris', concerning, for example, a *puella* suffering from a serious eye condition. She was healed at the altar of St Julian of Brioude thanks to the alms that her father had given to the poor who crowded the martyr's basilica⁷⁰. In the four books of 'De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi' we learn that *Theodomundus*, a deaf and mute man, went to the basilica of the saint every day, where he regularly shared with other poor people the alms he was given because of his infirmity, until he was miraculously cured⁷¹; Leuboveus, on the other hand, was such a poor paralytic, as Gregory asserts, that he could not get anyone to help him to get to Martin's tomb, where he arrived dragging himself miserably on the ground, until he finally got the saint to heal his legs⁷².

In the 'Liber vitae patrum' it is worth noting bishop Quintianus of Rodez, who fully embodies the prototype of the merciful *episcopus*, solicitous in succouring the weakest, in whom he saw the authentic image of Christ: "Hurry, hurry", he used to order when he saw a *pauper* asking for help, "and give the poor man the food he needs! For you are ignorant – lazy ones! – and perhaps this man is the one who, in the Gospel, commanded himself to be fed in the poorest man!"⁷³ Quintianus's great respect for

⁷⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani martyris* (as note 31), 38.

⁷¹ Gregory of Tours, *Libri I–IV de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/2), Hannover 1885, I.7; see also II.22 and II.23.

⁷² Gregory of Tours, *Libri I–IV de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi* (as note 71), II.7.

⁷³ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/2), Hannover 1885, IV.4 (for the translation see Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles*, ed. GISELLE DE NIE [Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 39], Cambridge [MA] – London 2015, p. 55).

the poor, whom he welcomed into his home with the same hospitality reserved for senators, is also remarkable ⁷⁴. A parallel between these two very distinct social classes is again posited here, a parallel that should not appear so weird since saints, like Quin-
tianus, not infrequently found themselves bringing these two worlds, at the antipodes
of the world of sixth-century Merovingian Gaul, into contact with each other. As
stated earlier, “the very rich and the very poor”, as Peter Brown asserts ⁷⁵, can come
into contact with each other, and in particular the *senatores*, in imitation of the bishops,
were to lavish charity. Moreover, many Gallo-Roman bishops, including Gregory of
Tours, could boast of links with the senatorial class ⁷⁶; these *episcopi*, without renounc-
ing their high social status, by their example, could promote works of mercy towards
the marginalised. No less committed to assisting the needy than Quintianus appears
abbot Senoch, prodigal in donating to the poor the money offered to him by the faith-
ful, following the example of the verses from Matthew: “Do not lay up for yourselves
treasures on earth”, since, Gregory points out, still quoting the Gospel, “where your
treasure is, there will your heart be also.” ⁷⁷

Another interesting fact is the one reported in the source about the specific use
of the resources available to Senoch, who had, in fact, redeemed the freedom of many
reduced to servitude due to debts incurred. Although dedicated to a life of prayer
and severe renunciation within a cell of his monastery, Senoch is not unaware of the
pressing needs of the most needy ⁷⁸. The proximity of the saints to the poor is, more-
over, well represented by Lupicinus, who, before leading his existence as a recluse to
devote himself to prayer and penance, went around begging for alms, which he then
sibi similibus erogabat ⁷⁹. In the ‘Liber in gloria confessorum’, Nicetius, bishop of Lyon,
the recluse Eusicius, Nicetius, bishop of Trier, and Paulinus, bishop of Nola, can be
highlighted as ready to renounce earthly goods to bring relief to the *pauperes* ⁸⁰. Prac-
tising mercy is also prompted by the episode of the captain of a ship who had lost his

⁷⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* (as note 73), IV.5.

⁷⁵ See above note 1.

⁷⁶ On this theme, with an overview of the specific bibliography, see SILVIA CANTELLI BERARDUCCI, *Elezioni e consacrazioni episcopali nella Gallia merovingia del sec. VI*, in: *Archivio Storico Italiano* 172, 2014, pp. 3–76, here pp. 37–43; CONRAD WALTER – STEFFEN PATZOLD, *Der Episkopat im Frankenreich der Merowingerzeit. Eine sich durch Verwandtschaft reproduzierende Elite?*, in: STEFFEN PATZOLD – KARL UBL (eds.), *Verwandtschaft, Name und soziale Ordnung (300–1000)*, Berlin – Boston 2014, pp. 109–139.

⁷⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* (as note 73), XV.1 (for the translation see Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles* [as note 73], pp. 213–215); see Mt 6.19 and 21.

⁷⁸ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* (as note 73), XV.1. Mention should be made here of the conduct of the bishop of Langres, Gregory, who in “fasting, almsgiving, praying, and keeping vigils [...] was so assiduous and devout that, although placed in the middle of the world, he shone like a new kind of hermit” (*ibid.*, VII.2; for the translation see Gregory of Tours, *Lives and Miracles* [as note 73], p. 93).

⁷⁹ Gregory of Tours, *Liber vitae patrum* (as note 73), XIII.1.

⁸⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum*, ed. BRUNO KRUSCH (MGH SS rer. Merov. I/2), Han-
nover 1885, see respectively 60, 81, and 108.

entire cargo as a result of the celestial punishment that had befallen him for refusing to give charity to a needy person⁸¹. Sometimes it was the *virī Dei* who had to provide succour to the bishops themselves. In the ‘Liber in gloria martyrum’ the help of saint Laurentius, “who always cherish[es] and assist[s] the poor”, was invoked to allow an *episcopus*, who did not have sufficient means, to complete the repair of a church dedicated to the martyr⁸².

Gregory considers these miracles to be the way of salvation offered by the saints to the poor, whose condition is often associated with illness, of whose devastating effects the ‘Libri octo Miraculorum’ give ample testimony. In the face of the numerous and serious ills that afflicted the faithful, only the *virī Dei*, and not the common doctors who are considered by Gregory to be charlatans⁸³, could offer the only concrete help. And the charity bestowed by some of these sick people was perhaps, alongside prayer, a further means of obtaining the fundamental help of the saints. The above-mentioned examples of Quintianus and Senoch also testify to the attention paid to the proper use of earthly riches for the benefit of the poor. Gregory’s hagiographical accounts do not lack cases of miracles whose purpose was, again, to punish those who dared to take possession of ecclesiastical goods intended for the poor⁸⁴. Their physical and spiritual suffering thus appears in the ‘Libri octo Miraculorum’ as a way of highlighting the thaumaturgical powers of the saints, whose miracles could better impress the faithful if the beneficiaries were not just an indistinct mass of marginalised people, but concrete figures of women and men with whom they could identify. This is an individual dimension missing in the ‘Libri Historiarum’, where the focus is not on the poor but on those who help them, as Albini has pointed out⁸⁵.

6. CONCLUSION

A *rex* like Chilperic I, who “hated the poor and all that they stood for”⁸⁶, an enemy *gens* like the Lombards, and the *negutiatōres* who, following the outbreak of famine, speculated on the price of grain so as to further worsen the living conditions of those most in need⁸⁷, symbolised, therefore, in Gregory’s eyes the enemies of the *pauperes*. These, instead, constituted a precious resource for Gregory of Tours, a human capital

⁸¹ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum* (as note 80), 109.

⁸² Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum* (as note 44), 41 (for the translation see Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, ed. RAYMOND VAN DAM [Translated Texts for Historians 4], Liverpool 2004, p. 40). Cf. Id., *Liber in gloria confessorum* (as note 80), 5.

⁸³ See JOHN KITCHEN, *Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers. The Dynamics of Healing in Gregory of Tours’s De virtutibus Sancti Martini*, in: *Florilegium* 12, 1993, pp. 15–32.

⁸⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum* (as note 44), 60 and 78; Id., *Libri I–IV de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi* (as note 71), I.31.

⁸⁵ ALBINI, *Poveri e povertà nel Medioevo* (as note 3), p. 13.

⁸⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VI.46 (THORPE, p. 380).

⁸⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VII.45.

to be safeguarded for the spiritual benefits attained by the rich through bestowing alms on this often indistinct mass of marginalised people. It is necessary, in this sense, to call into question the 'logic of charity', based on the fear of eternal punishment that strongly urged the rich (to save their own souls) to help the weak⁸⁸. The impending punishment of God or a deep compassion in one's soul for the poor, to take up some of the ideas mentioned above, moved sovereigns such as Chlothar I, Chilperic I and Fredegund to repent the abuses committed at the expense of the poor, and many Gallic bishops to comfort the faithful in difficulty. These faithful are, although placed on the margins of society, observed in the 'Libri Historiarum' from the perspective of one of the most influential bishops of sixth-century Gaul.

In conclusion, the needy, in the economy of Gregory's work, act as a litmus test for the mercy of some and the inhumanity of others⁸⁹. So, the poor are not regarded as 'outsiders', not definitively excluded from society. In the case of the most charitable ones, we have considered some less famous characters, such as Chrodin or the wife of Namatius, to saints such as Guntram or Radegund, while in the case of the less compassionate ones, we have compared obscure merchants ready to take advantage of a sudden crisis to kings such as Theuderic I or Chilperic I who, in order to satisfy their lust for power, had not even spared the church's goods destined to the poor. An attempt was made to remedy the poor's social fragility thanks to the concrete action of those who, whether lay or ecclesiastical, saw the figure of Christ in every needy person⁹⁰ and were able to help those who stretched out their hand to receive alms, setting aside, at the same time, a credit to be put to good use to enter the kingdom of heaven. "Let your association be with the purses of the poor", Gregory exhorted in closing his 'Liber in gloria confessorum', "that extinguish the raging fire of eternal hell!"⁹¹

Nevertheless, the *pauperes* had become a useful tool in the pursuit of anything but spiritual ends. This is what happened in the case of the *matricularii* involved in the affair of Claudius, an assassin sent by king Guntram to eliminate the *cubicularius* Eberulf, ac-

⁸⁸ ALBINI, *Poveri e povertà nel Medioevo* (as note 3), p. 13; see also NERI, *I marginali nell'Occidente tardoantico* (as note 12), pp. 121–127.

⁸⁹ However, without neglecting the fact that in some cases Gregory had accentuated the image of some of the protagonists of his stories in a negative light, as for Theuderic I or Sophia.

⁹⁰ See PETER BROWN, *The Ransom of the Soul. Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity*, Cambridge (MA) 2015, pp. 172–173: "As a result, by the sixth century, the notion of the poor as perpetual victims, identified with Christ, served to sacralize ecclesiastical property. The growing estates of the church were ringed with the equivalent of an alarm system, calculated to go off at the slightest touch. Any attack on the lands of the church was an attack on the poor. And an attack on the poor was an attack on Christ Himself. For it was from the estates of the church that the poor were supposed to be fed. Those who attempted to appropriate church lands, or who had held back legacies made to the church, were regularly denounced as *necatores pauperum* – as 'murderers of the poor.'"

⁹¹ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria confessorum* (as note 80), 110 (for the translation see Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, ed. RAYMOND VAN DAM [Translated Texts for Historians 5], Liverpool 2004, p. 85).

cused of the murder of Chilperic I⁹², or in the case of the assassins who, disguised as beggars, tried to kill Childebert II (575–596) at the behest of Fredegund⁹³. The general framework that emerges from the analysis of these case studies taken from the ‘*Libri Historiarum*’ is the result of the view that Gregory of Tours, member of the upper hierarchy of the Gallic church, had of the poor, a view that coincides with the one that had been developed by other influential Christian authors.

The provision of the divine dispensation decided that there should be different grades and distinct orders for this reason, that while inferiors show reverence to the more powerful, and the more powerful bestow love on their inferiors, one harmonious concord may be created out of diversity, and the administration of individual offices may be properly carried out⁹⁴.

This virtuous mechanism was described by Gregory the Great, who became pope in 590, and had already been theorised, as mentioned above, by Caesarius, who ascended to the episcopal see of Arles in 502. Between them there was Gregory of Tours, who, for his part, had seen more than one flaw that vitiated the harmony between *divites* and *pauperes* desired by the bishops of Arles and Rome.

⁹² Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VII.29, and VII.22 about Eberulf and his hostility towards the poor; see JONES, *Social Mobility* (as note 42), pp. 230–233.

⁹³ Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), VIII.29; see WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* (as note 30), pp. 124–126. The singular episode of the False Christ of Bourges is worth mentioning here, a man claiming to be a healer, who fascinated not only the *rusticiores*, the most naïve believers, but also the clergy, increasing his credit with the people by distributing the fruits of his robberies among the poor, see Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X (as note 4), X.25; cf. CATERINA LAVARRA, ‘Pseudochristi’ e ‘pseudoprophetae’ nella Gallia merovingia, in: *Quaderni medievali* 13, 1982, pp. 6–43, here pp. 19, 23, 28–29; WILLIAM E. KLINGSHIRN, *Magic and Divination in the Merovingian World*, in: EFFROS – MOREIRA (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World* (as note 3), pp. 968–987, here p. 971.

⁹⁴ Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, Libri I–VII, ed. DAG NORBERG (CC 140), Turnhout 1982, V.59 (for the translation see *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, vol. 2: Books 5–9, ed. JOHN R. C. MARTYN [Mediaeval Sources in Translation 40], Toronto 2004, p. 394). The bishop of Tours does not fail to mention the pope’s prodigality towards the most needy, as he sold part of the land he owned to give it to the poor (Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* X [as note 4], X.1).