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**INTELLECTUAL SOURCES  
OF HISTORIAN'S LEGITIMIZATION  
– THE CASE OF GREGORY OF TOURS**

**SUMMARY:** The question of Gregory's of Tours awareness of the persuasive potential of his learning he demonstrates in his works is discussed. The Tournonian bishop's high evaluation of the erudition of other men is clearly shown and juxtaposed with his opinion concerning his linguistic competence. Gregory's ability to embellish his style, being a sign of the literary training is demonstrated. His degree of acquaintance with the classical literature is assessed and his familiarity with Latin poetry is underlined. The literal meaning of his statements concerning classical literature as detrimental to a Christian soul is contrasted with the subtle and indirect play those statements engage his readers in; their implicit meaning is shown to contradict their direct significance. Various examples of Gregory's efforts to display his erudition in the field of literature and his high degree of learning, including a fair number of erudite digressions are brought forth. Gregory's unambiguous statement concerning the intention with which he inserted them into his text is evoked. Finally, the Tournonian Bishop's positive judgment about his audience's capacity of properly evaluating the erudite content of his writing is demonstrated and corroborated with the external evidence provided by contemporary sources.

**KEYWORDS:** intellectual, erudition, persuasion, classics, Late Antiquity

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the almost whole literary activity of Gregory of Tours<sup>1</sup> was twofold: to register (or, at least, to transmit) the facts and to make them credible, i.e. to persuade the reader that he should accept them as events having taken place precisely in the manner the historian wrote them down.<sup>2</sup> It goes without saying that Gregory was forcing his interpretations of the past on his readers. On the other hand, it is he himself who, directly or not, admits that his audience may have experienced difficulties in accepting his narrative. The most obvious place is *Hist.* IV 13.<sup>3</sup> The narratives of Gregory, who saw them as means of preservation and propagation of what he accepted as *facts* give us another insight into how at least part of his audience was not ready to hold his accounts to be (Goffart 1988: 174).<sup>4</sup> The aim of the present article is to discover, if Gregory himself saw the fact of being *an intellectual* as one of historian's means of persuasion and if he himself wanted to underline his intellectual quality in order to make his account more credible.

To answer this question, however, we should discern which categories Gregory associated with *being an intellectual*. The word *intellectual* itself is relatively new, as is the concept of *an intellectual* associated with it. Judging from his own writings, Gregory would – as it will be demonstrated – probably appreciate another term: *a learned man, an erudite*.

<sup>1</sup> *De cursu stellarum* is perhaps the exception, although its first part devoted to human and divine wonders of the world has an overall registrative character.

<sup>2</sup> Breukelaar (1994: 92) writes: *As with all literary narrative, historia seeks to convince. Its main purpose is persuasio, convincing the audience of the opinion of the narrator. Because the narrative is to serve party interest, it has to be acceptable in the first place. Therefore, its capital virtue is narratio probabilis, verisimilis or credibilis.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sed nos haec narrantis, Salustii sententiam, quam in detractaturibus historiografforum protulit, memoramus. Ait enim: Arduum videtur res gestas scribere: primum quod facta dictis exaequanda sunt; deinde quia plerique quae delecta repraehenderis malevolentia et invidia dicta putant.*

<sup>4</sup> Two examples taken from a single hagiographical work should illustrate this sufficiently: *Virt. Iuli.* 1: *Quod necuiquam fortassis videatur incredibilis esse narratio, quae audivi gesta fideliter proda;*. *Virt. Iuli.* 1 27: *Quod si haec fortuitu quis putat, admiretur magis et stupeat incliti potentiam martyris, quod praeteriens ignis per medium populi neminem nocuit [...].*

## I. ERUDITES OTHER THAN GREGORY

Gregory's opinion about education and those who received it can be inferred from what he wrote about men other than himself. In such cases, he did not feel forced to use the *topoi* of self humiliation he so often and so zealously applied to himself and his intellectual qualities.<sup>5</sup>

It may be argued that the schooling one could receive in Gaul in the sixth century was not even remotely as good as it used to be before and shortly after the collapse of the Roman rule. Gregory himself seems to have noticed it, at least this is what can be inferred from the literal, not nuanced reading of his famous *Praefatio prima*.<sup>6</sup> We are told that good classical education available for laymen was almost totally substituted by the Church oriented study of the Bible and patristic literature the main aim of which was to form future clergymen. (Kurth 1919: 1-11). However, neither did the classical learning disappear altogether,<sup>7</sup> nor was the shift from secular to ecclesiastical erudition responsible for the diminishing of the respect the learned could enjoy, as it is clear from Gregory's own writings. On the contrary, good education is often one of the constituent parts of person's positive characterization and is, as such, mentioned by the Bishop of Tours on many occasions in his various writings.

Gregory's work abounds in descriptions of people healed because of their piety towards God and his saints. However, not every prayer is answered and healing cannot be taken for granted. Sometimes it is because of the sinful behavior of a sick person (*Hist. Franc.* V 6), sometimes due to some other factor (*Gloria Mart.* 6). Gregory's positive characterization of the sick person excludes the first possibility and therefore announces that this particular member of the Church is

<sup>5</sup> See below.

<sup>6</sup> *Hist. I Praef. Prima: Decedente atque immo potius pereunte ab urbibus Gallicanis liberalium cultura litterarum, cum nonnullae res gererentur vel rectae vel improbae [...] nec reperire possit quisquam peritus dialectica in arte grammaticus, qui haec aut stilo prosaico aut metrico depingeret versu: ingemescebant saepius plerique, dicentes: 'Vae diebus nostris, quia periit studium litterarum a nobis, nec reperitur rethor in populis, qui gesta praesentia promulgare possit in paginis'.*

<sup>7</sup> Kurth (1919: 4) constructed [*une*] *liste* [...] *assez modeste* of intellectuals living in the second half of the sixth century who received classical education.

likely to be healed by a saint. One of such men is Armentarius, a priest serving together with Gregory. His erudition and intellectual capacity constitute an important part of the positive characterization the bishop of Tours describes him with.<sup>8</sup> Armentarius, having suffered from a disease, is eventually healed. The enumeration of positive traits, among which erudition occupies a noteworthy place, sets the stage for his final recovery.

Gregory of Tours was far from considering that married couples engaging in sex could lead an exemplary life of Christian piety (Elliott 1993: 7). To please God, men and women ought to preserve their virginity (a *condicio sine qua non* of being chaste in the eyes of the Tournonian bishop) even within the framework of marriage. Among such saintly men Gregory portrays we can find certain Riticus (*Gloria confess.* 74). After the death of his wife, the virginal widower is elevated by the people to the episcopate of Autun – not an insignificant honor in the eyes of Gregory and his contemporaries. When he dies, his flock is not able to move his body and place it in a grave. And with a good reason: he and his wife had decided that their earthly remains should rest in a common tomb. His will having been revealed by an old man conscious of the arrangement the couple made, Riticus's body is located alongside that of his wife and the saintly and chaste bishop comes back to life for a moment just to address his wife. This miraculous story of an extraordinary man is introduced by Gregory with the words expressing the author's approval for the excellent education of the pious aristocrat.<sup>9</sup> The erudition acquired by the saintly man is presented as a virtue corresponding with his noble birth and religious life. Riticus is not only a chaste bishop, he is an intellectual as well.

Paulinus of Nola is another example of a married man, who preserved chastity (equaled by Gregory with virginity) and ascended to the episcopal throne (*Gloria confess.* 108). An aristocrat by birth, he

<sup>8</sup> *Virt. Mart.* I 33: *Unus ex clericis meis Armenterius nomine, bene eruditus in spiritualibus scripturis, cui tam facile erat sonorum modulationes adprehendere, ut eum non putaris hoc meditare, sed scribere [...].*

<sup>9</sup> *Gloria confess.* 74: *Fuit enim nobilissimis parentibus et litterarum acumine clarus, qui, transacta aduliscentia, uxorem simili morum honestate praeclaram sortitusest, cum qua spiritalis dilectionis conhibentia, non luxoria copulatur. Concurrent elymosinae, vigiliae caelebrantur, et opus Dei per eos incessabiliter exercetur.*

nevertheless sold all his property and gave the money thus received to the poor. Portraying him, Gregory underlines his learning, of which he made use as an author of the works in honor of Saint Martin of Tours.<sup>10</sup> A devoted worshipper of the Tournonian bishop, he was found worthy of seeing him at his deathbed: *Martinum Genuariumque Italicum, priusquam spiritum redderet, corporeis oculis contemplantet* [...].

Saint Patroclus, as Gregory reveals, was not only helped by God in his education, but also ascribed the very idea that he could receive it to the Most High (*Vita partum IX 1*). In his early years he worked as a shepherd, while his seemingly more intellectually capable brother was sent to school. When his brother insults him calling him a rude peasant (*rusticus*), he understands his words as a divine stimulus and decides to get education. He does not need much time to achieve greater success in learning than his brother, which should not astonish the reader of his *vita*, as he is favored by God in his quest for knowledge: *fratrem vel in scientia praecederet vel alacritate sensus, adnuente divini Numini auxilio, anteiret* (*Vita partum IX 1*). One does need to take into account that the person in question is a future hermit. Gregory, however, not only does not reproach his attitude towards education, but presents the process of learning the future saint undergoes as something harmonizing well enough with the ascetic life he will lead in the future.

Gregory not only sees good education as a positive thing; he stresses the lack of it to denigrate people he criticizes. The vicious bishop Cautinus is described in the manner that associates his ungodliness and his positive attitude towards unconverted Jews<sup>11</sup> with his lack of learning. It is interesting that he reproaches him for not having studied not only ecclesiastical, but also secular, i.e. pagan literature.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Gloria confess.* 108: *Erat autem vir sanctus mirae prudentiae et rethoricis litteris eruditus. Quod opus eius, de quanto ad nos pervenit, valde patefacit. Nam cum ad diversos tam versu quam prosa scripserit de virtutibus beati Martini sex versu conscripsit libros scripsit et alios versiculos in laude eius.*

<sup>11</sup> As Gregory's opinion about Jews can hardly be called positive or even neutral, he sees the fact that a person as representative for the Church hierarchy as a bishop treats them amicably as scandalous.

<sup>12</sup> *Hist. IV 12: In Cautino autem nihil sancti, nihil pensi fuit. De omnibus enim scripturis, tam ecclesiasticis quam saecularibus, adplene immunis fuit. Iudaeis valde carus ac subditus erat, non pro salute, ut pastoris cura debet esse sollicita, sed pro*

Those few examples demonstrate that Gregory was by no means prone to reproach the learning of others. Neither was he ready to associate the fact of having received good education with vanity. The embarrassing strife of two intellectuals, Asteriolus and Secundinus, could have given him an opportunity to do so, had he wanted to stress the darker side of learning.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he chose to stress the successful career Secundinus made as an ambassador to the Byzantine court as the factor stimulating his vanity. We should keep in mind the high evaluation the Bishop of Tours gave to education received by other people while examining Gregory's approach to his own intellectual qualities and their possible persuasive valor.

## II. GREGORY THE INTELLECTUAL

One of the sources of Gregory's authority and his capacity to influence his readers was the fact that he was the Bishop of Tours. Those high officials of the Church who preceded him had accumulated great prestige by connecting themselves to the apostolic origins of the Christian community.<sup>14</sup> If the respect the believers felt towards their pastors was enormous already in the first centuries of Christianity, bishops exploited the fall of the Roman Empire and the collapse of the imperial administration to influence not only the spiritual well-being of the flock commissioned to them, but also the political life of the Merovingian kingdoms. Thus, they were presenting themselves not only as successors to the apostles, but to the Roman state apparatus as well (Moore 2011: 5).

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*comparandis speciebus, quas, cum hic blandiretur et illi se adultores manifestissime declararent, maiori quam constabant pretio venundabant.*

<sup>13</sup> *Hist. III 33: Asteriolus tunc et Secundinus magni cum rege habebantur; erat autem uterque sapiens et retoricis inbutus litteris. Sed Secundinus plerumque legationem imperatori a rege missus intulit, et ob hoc iactantia sumpserat ac nonnulla contra rationem exercebat.*

<sup>14</sup> Sullivan, Wood 2003: 415: *In any case, from the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen it is certain that by the third century orthodox Christian communities everywhere recognized their bishops as the successors to the apostles in their role as pastors and teachers.*

But did Gregory draw his persuasive power as a writer only from the high post he occupied in the Church administration? Was the mantle of his mighty predecessor, Saint Martin of Tours<sup>15</sup> the only argument he could gain the trust of his readers with?

Gregory's literary erudition was sufficiently evaluated by Kurth (1919: 11-29). In his analysis the Tournonian bishop presents himself as someone remaining under the charm of Latin poetry, especially of the works of Virgil, from whom he borrows a fair number of phrases. He was also acquainted, we are told, with the works of Christian poets, whose mastery he, an avid reader of literature in general, deeply admired.<sup>16</sup> But poetry was not the only form of literature he nourished himself with; we will expand on this point in the course of the present article. It is important, however, to remember that what is being assessed here is neither the number of works known to him, nor his intellectual capacity as such, but rather the use he makes of both to present himself as a trustworthy narrator.

The author of the *Histories* has been since long known for his self-humiliating statements in which he addresses what he portrays as his lack of linguistic and rhetorical skills. The most obvious statement is *Praefatio prima* with which the Tournonian bishop opens his historiographical work.<sup>17</sup> Gregory's harsh judgment with which he measured his learning has been the cause of controversy among scholars for more than a hundred years. Shall we conclude with Traube (1911: 54), that [*d*]as ist nun aber nicht so ernst zu nehmen. Derartige Entschuldigungen gehörten zum Stil, derartige Anklagen und scheinbaren

<sup>15</sup> On the authority of Martin of Tours see e.g. Heinzlmann 2001: 169-170.

<sup>16</sup> Kurth 1919: 28: *Mais, avant tout, je crois devoir attribuer cette connaissance de Virgile au goût de notre auteur pour la poésie. Ce goût était très vif; nous en avons la preuve dans ce fait qu'il a lu à peu près tout ce qui existait de son temps en fait de poésie chrétienne. Prudence, Sedulius, Paulin de Noie, Paulin de Périgueux, Sidoine Apollinaire et Fortunat défendent dans ses écrits, sans compter un certain poète du nom d'Hilarius et plusieurs inscriptions en vers qu'il reproduit. Telle est son estime de la forme poétique, qu'il invite ceux qui voudront corriger sa chronique à la mettre en vers et leur promet que ce sera leur gloire. De même il leur fait mettre en vers, par son ami Fortunat, ses Miracles de saint Martin, et il regrette que ce ne soit pas Fortunat ou Paulin qui ait écrit ce livre. [...] Il y a dans tout cela la preuve d'un amour véritable de la poésie et de la littérature en général [...].*

<sup>17</sup> *Hist. I Praef. prima.*

*Unterschätzungen oder Ablehnungen der Grammatik sind selbst nichts anderes als rhetorische Kunstgriffe*, or is the credit to be given to Bonnet (1890: 78-80), who takes Gregory's self accusations at face value, interpreting them to be the writer's sincere opinion about his wanting education and literary skills?<sup>18</sup>

To say that Gregory's Latin is far removed from the classical norm is to state the obvious fact he himself was well aware of.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the author of the *Histories* was skilled enough to elevate his style and made frequent use of this capacity when he especially wanted to present it, namely, in the prefaces to many of his writings. They are remarkably more rhetoricised than the narrative parts of his texts. The two prefaces with which Gregory opens his work (one addressing the *Histories* as such and the other the Book I) demonstrate this in a very ostensible manner. In the *Praefatio prima*, Gregory makes frequent use of antithesis (Breukelaar 1994: 307) and alliterations; as a matter of fact, the antithesis is its dominant stylistic component. The preface to the Book I abounds in abstract terms otherwise rarely employed by him even at analogous places<sup>20</sup> (Kaltenstadler 2011: 35-36). Moreover, the word order he employs is not, we are told by Bonnet (1890: 717), the so-called natural order. Although it has been argued that he does not fully understand how to invert the sequence of words properly, i.e. with the accordance with the usage of classical authors (Bonnet 1890: 719), it is beyond any doubt that the aim for which this *color rhetoricus* was displayed by Gregory (mainly in prefaces, but also elsewhere in his texts) was to impress the reader and to remind him of the fact that

<sup>18</sup> Thürlemann (1974: 60-72) summarizes scholars' opinions on the *humility topos* and its possible meaning in Gregory of Tours.

<sup>19</sup> *Gloria confess.* Praef.: *Sed timeo, ne, cum scribere coepero, quia sum sine litteris rethoricis et arte grammatica, dicaturque mihi a litteratis: 'O rustice et idiota, ut quid nomen tuum inter scriptores indi aestimas? Ut opus hoc a peritis accipi putas, cui ingenium artis non subpeditat, nec ulla litterarum scientia subministrat? Qui nullum argumentum utile in litteris habes, qui nomina discernere nescis; saepius pro masculinis feminea, pro femineis neutra et pro neutra masculine conmutas; qui ipsas quoque praepositiones, quas nobilium dictatorum observari sanxit auctoritas, loco debito plerumque non locas. Nam ablativis accusative et rursus aecusativis ablativae praeponeis [...]'.*

<sup>20</sup> In its final sentence *Libuit etiam animo, ut pro supputatione annorum ab ipso mundi principio libri primi poniretur initium, cuius capitula deorsum subieci.* the letter *i* occurs 22 times (Kaltenstadler 2011: 36).



he has to do with a skilled writer applying refined literary technique. Further observations shall more fully demonstrate that the literal sense of Gregory's statements concerning his supposedly wanting erudition stays in sharp contrast with the meaning he conveyed implicitly.

Gregory's *Glory of the Martyrs* begins with the refutation of the pagan literature and culture that Jerome in his famous *Letter to Eustochium* made into one of the frequently recurring *topoi* of Christian Latin literature.<sup>21</sup> Having stated, in accordance with the translator of the Bible, how dangerous for one's eternal salvation is the engagement into the reading of classical authors, he provides his audience with the copious examples illustrating the content of this spiritually detrimental literature.<sup>22</sup> In so doing, he demonstrates three different things: that he is acquainted with the writings of Jerome, one of the most influential classics of Christian letters; that he himself is well aware of the fact that Jerome's caveat concerning the reading of classics is, in fact, a *topos* and, finally, that he himself had fully ignored the precept of his great predecessor. The literal meaning of this passage is a simple elaboration on the theme of the poisonous effect of the classics on a Christian soul. However, the prolonged enumeration of Virgilian themes leaves no doubt as to the fact that the implicit aim of the text is to demonstrate Gregory's literary erudition. This is hardly the only case in which the author accumulates examples intended to prove his wide intellectual

<sup>21</sup> *Gloria mart. Praef.: Hieronimus presbyter et post apostolum Paulum bonus doctor ecclesiae refert se ductum ante tribunal aeterni iudicis et extensum in supplicio graviter caesum, eo quod Ciceronis argutias vel Vergilii fallacias saepius lecitaret, confessumque se coram angelis sanctis ipsi Dominatori omnium, numquam se deinceps haec lecturum neque ultra tractaturum, nisi ea quae Deo digna et ad ecclesiae aedificationem oportuna iudicarentur.*

<sup>22</sup> *Gloria mart. Praef.: Non ego Saturni fugam, non Iunonis iram, non Iovis stupra, non Neptuni iniuriam, non Eoli sceptrum, non Aeneada bella, naufragio vel regna commemoro. Taceo Cupidinis emissionem, non Ascanii dilectionem emeneosque lacrimas vel exitia saeva Didonis, non Plutonis triste vestibulum, non Proserpinae stuprum, non Cerberi triforme caput, non revolvam Anchisae colloquia, non Itachis ingenia, non Achillis argutias, non Senonis fallacias. Non ego Laguonthe consilia, non Amphitridis robora, non Iani conflictus, fugas vel obitum exitiale proferam. Non Eomenidum variorumque monstrorum formas exponam, non reliquarum fabularum commenta, quae hic auctor aut finxit mendacio aut versu depinxit heroico.* The poet in question here is, of course, Vergil, to whom Gregory wrongly attributes the story of Proserpine described by Ovid (Arndt, Krusch 1969: 38, n. 17).

horizons. The amount of literary references Gregory inserted in the short text of *De cursu stellarum* was applauded by Krusch, the editor of the text (Arndt, Krusch 1969: 405).<sup>23</sup> The author was well-read enough to allow himself to pronounce his philosophically based judgment on a subtle stylistic question after having cited and confronted with each other two authoritative sources on it.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the present article the possibility that those are second-hand citations is without significance; naming them would suffice to evoke the impression that Gregory is able to partake in the stylistic discourse alongside with Aulus Gellius and Pliny.

The foreword attached to Book I proves Gregory training in historiography.<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy how Gregory manages here to add one additional name to the list of authors he read. For he knew the work of Eusebius only in the Latin shape given to it by Jerome. The custom of quoting authors one had only indirect access to in a way that would suggest to the readers author's acquaintance with the original text is rooted in the ancient tradition (Addey 2014: 92) and the aim Gregory introduces both his direct and indirect source for may only by described as persuasion: the argument is corroborated by an artificially extended list of sources proving it.

Yet, the Bishop of Tours was not only an avid reader of historiographical literature, he felt and made his readers feel that he was in position to read it critically. He devotes a whole chapter (*Hist.* II 9)

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<sup>23</sup> *Ut erat literis humanioribus apprime eruditus, in opusculo perparvo septem scriptores laudavit, inter quos poetae praevalent.* The works cited in the astronomical treaty are those of Virgil, Prudentius, Hilary of Arles, Jerome, Orosius, Iulius Titianus and the anonymous *Carmen de Phoenice* attributed by Gregory to Lactantius.

<sup>24</sup> *Vita patr. Praef.: Et quaeritur a quibusdam, utrum vita sanctorum an vitas dicere debeamus. A. Gellius quoque et complures philosophorum vitas dicere voluerunt. Nam Plinius auctor in tertio artis grammaticae libro ait: Vitas antiqui cuiuscumque nostrum dixerunt; sed grammatici pluralem numerum non putaverunt habere vitam. Unde manifestum est, melius dici vitam patrum quam vitas, quia, cum sit diversitas meritorum virtutumque, una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo.*

<sup>25</sup> *Hist. I Praef.: De subpotatione vero huius mundi evidenter chronicae Eusebii Caesariensis episcopi ac Hieronimi presbiteri prolocuntur et rationem de omni annorum serie pandunt. Nam et Horosius diligentissime haec inquaerens, omnem numerum annorum ab initio mundi usque ad suum tempus in unum colligit. Hoc etiam et Victorius cum ordine paschalis solemnitates inquirere fecit.*

to the examination the accounts on Franks written by Sulpicius Alexander and Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus (two historians whose works are lost), Orosius. Gregory wants to know if it is more proper to call the Frankish rulers of old *reges* or *duces*.<sup>26</sup> With this question in mind, he examines his sources posing them questions relevant to the theme of his inquiry.<sup>27</sup> Having stated that *[h]anc nobis notitiam de Francis memorati historici reliquere, regibus non nominates*, Gregory resorts to the oral tradition (*Tradunt enim multi [...]*) corroborated by the evidence provided by *Fasti consulares* (*[n]am et in Consolaribus legimus [...]*) to conclude that kingship was introduced by Franks only at the later stage of their history.

The author of the *Histories* embellished his writings with a fair number of erudite digressions. He openly confesses that he introduces them to make his readers believe in the high degree of his learning: *Ergo ne videamur unius tantum Hebraeae gentes habere notitiam, reliqua regna, quae vel quali Israhelitarum fuerint tempore, memoramus.* (*Hist.* I 17). Thus, Gregory expands his summary of the Old Testament with some extrabiblical material, lest his public believes that his knowledge of the ancient times is limited to the religious in nature content of the biblical books. He even tries to impress the reader with a supposedly Egyptian term: *[...] apud Aegyptios autem sexta decima erat potestas, quam sua lingua dinastiam vocabam.* (*Hist.* I 17). There is no need to guess if his public knew the etymology of the word better than him, what is important is the fact that he believed he knew it well enough to show his learning.

It has been observed that Gregory had some understanding of architecture and that he showed some interest for nature (Blume 1970: 164-166). Descriptions of specific buildings are by no means rare by him and they also may be turn into a source of learned factoids, especially when the building in question is something as old and exotic as the city of

<sup>26</sup> Isidore of Seville witnesses that this was not devoid of for contemporaries of Gregory: *Historia de reg.* II: *Per multa quippe retro saecula [Gothi] ducibus usi sunt, postea regibus [...]*.

<sup>27</sup> *Hist.* II 9: *Cum autem eos regales [Sulpicius Alexander] vocet, nescimus, utrum reges fuerint, an in vices tenuerunt regnum. [...] Movet nos haec causa, quod cum aliorum gentium regis [Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus] nominat, cur non nomet et Francorum.*

Babylon, description of which Gregory found in Orosius.<sup>28</sup> Yet, he does not miss the chance to exploit the information he got from the oral tradition (represented by *sapientes*) if only it may account for a digression containing not only interesting details, but also giving him the opportunity to demonstrate his exegetical abilities, as it is the case of the account of the Crossing of the Red Sea.<sup>29</sup> It is important to observe that Gregory, despite having been accused of not being able to structure his material, is conscious that such paragraphs are digressions from the main narrative. He demonstrates this awareness by the choice of verb *inserere*, which he employs when he introduces digressions (Breukelaar 1994: 99).

Still, was his public ready to recognize such erudition as a positive trait? As the subject we are exploring is Gregory's own perception of his persuasive capacities, it would suffice to answer this question entirely on the basis of the internal reference. The very attitude Gregory exhibits towards learning and his frequent appeals to the erudition he acquired, as well as the general absence of contestation of the learning itself and the very fact that he portrays his potential critics as reproaching him for the lack of proper training in letters (*Gloria confess. Praef.*) leave no doubt as to the fact that he was certain that by presenting himself as a learned man he would be able to win the respect of his readers and to disarm his potential detractors. The world he and his contemporaries inhabited valued not only ecclesiastical, but also secular learning and this can be observed even by an author such as Gregory the Great,

<sup>28</sup> *Hist. I 6: Haec est Babilonia a Nebroth gygante aedificata, filio Chus. Et, sicut Horosi narrat historia, mira campi planitiae in quadrum disposita est. Munis eius ex coctili latere infusu bitumine in latum habet cubitus quinquaginta, altitudinis cubitus 200, in circuitu stadia 470. Unus stadius habet aripennes quinque. Vicinae quinae portae per unumquemque latus sitae sunt, quae faciunt 100. Harum portarum ustia mirae magnitudinis ex aere fusile sunt formata. Multa et alia de hac civitate isdem historiographus narrat, addens: Et cum tanta fuisset honestas aedificii, attamen victa atque subversa est.*

<sup>29</sup> *Hist. I 10: De quo transitu multa, ut dixi, narrantur; sed nos quod a sapientibus et certe illis hominibus, qui in eodem locum accesserant, virum cognovimus, ea inserere studuemus paginae. Aiunt etiam, sulcos, quos rotae currum fecerant, usque hodie permanere et, quantum acies oculorum videre potest, in profundo cerni. [...] Alii vero asserent, unum cunctis ingressum, nonnulli, unicuique tribui suam patuisse viam, illud testimonium psalterii abutentes: Qui divisit mare Rubrum in divisiones. Quas nos divisiones spiritaliter et non secundum littera intellegere oportet.*

who has quite unjustly become notorious for his supposed hostility towards the classics. As a matter of fact, he ascribed a major, although preparatory role to the training in secular literature and it is from his correspondence that his episcopal colleague from Gaul was even more liberal in that respect (Cecchi, Sapegno 1965: 60-70). To cite one other example, Fredegar's *sententia [m]undus iam seniscit, ideoque prudentiae agumen in nobis tepiscit, nec quisquam potest huius tempore, nec presumit oratoribus precedentes esse consimilis* (*Chronic. IV Prol.*) pronounced some 50 years after Gregory finished his work expresses nothing other than the longing for the learning now lost. This longing is an expression of the high esteem in which the seventh century elite held education; could their sixth century antecessors value it less?

## CONCLUSION

Gregory of Tours not only valued the erudition of other people, but, despite his self-humiliating statements concerning his own supposed lack of learning, made use of the amount of education he received to present himself as an authoritative, trustworthy author in the eyes of his readers. One needs to carefully distinguish between Gregory's evaluation of his linguistic competence and the ways he expresses his erudition as such. The first is to be taken more or less at face value, however the fact that Gregory is able to write in a remarkably more sophisticated manner when he wishes to impress his readers should also be taken into account. The Bishop of Tours, directly admitting his inability to follow the classical norm of Latin, resorts to a great amount of mostly indirect ways of influencing his public with his education, to the quality of which his audience remains sensitive, a fact he is well aware of.

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