

# WORDS OF SILENCE OR SILENCE IN WORDS: ESSAY ON THE DECONSTRUCTION OF *HISTORiarum LIBRI DECEM* BY GREGORY OF TOURS<sup>[\*]</sup>

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"I have tried to discover what he did not say" Gisella de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower. Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours.*

## ABSTRACT

This essay seeks, as the title shows, a deconstruction of texts which composed a famous historical accounting, the *Historiarum Libri Decem*, written by bishop Gregory of Tours, at the end of the 6th century. As the author, Gregory should have been completely free to choose the subjects and narrative style to tell the events and persons in it. Nevertheless, there is a case at which the narratives on so complicated a series of events have to be forced to produce what the author did not have an intention to uncover. In Gregory's *Historiarum*, the topic on the hostile and violent confrontations between the party of Sichar and the clan of Aunon, having people of the region of Tours shaken with fears for many years, by interrelating with a story of the arrival of royal delegate for tax imposing at the city, seems to give an unusual opportunity to seize, otherwise unable, a historical reality all through the intertwining threads of event.

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## THE CURSE OF GREGORY OF TOURS

Gregory of Tours remains an invaluable author for all scholars of post-Roman times in the West and especially in the region of Gaul. Invaluable, because he gives us a detailed and lively account of all the events and countless facts that created a society in which Roman hegemony had recently ceased and because he is the only historian having bequeathed to us a wealth of memories on all aspects and figures of sixth century Gaul. Without his significant contribution, we would have remained ignorant of most of the events which took place on Roman Empire soil during the very crucial times that shaped the future of European history.

True, there is also Venance Fortunat, who, thanks to his various writings, brings us a myriad of valuable information on the officials that served the Merovingian royal courts, not to mention his poetic works that praise the people of the royal entourage.<sup>[1]</sup> These works give us a glimpse into the unusual profiles and personalities of the royal entourage, which Gregory chose to overlook for various reasons. However, it should straight away be added that the contribution of Fortunat, no matter how significant, is only complementary to Gregory's work. If the *Histoires* of Gregory had never come to light, thus providing the framework which enables us to interpret the palatine activities, Fortunat's data would have been largely deprived of its historical value in efforts to reconfigure the society of the Royal Court at the time.<sup>[2]</sup>

Certainly, one may quote the collection of correspondence exchanged be-

[1] I quote only studies that have appeared relatively recently: M. Reydellet, *La royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, (Rome, 1981), pp. 297-344; B. Brennan, The career of Venantius Fortunatus, *Traditio*, 41, 1985, pp. 49-78; P. Godman, Orpheus among the Barbarians, in *Poets and Emperors. Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry*, (Oxford, 1987), pp. 1-37; J. George, *Venantius Fortunatus. A Poet in Merovingian Gaul*, (Oxford, 1992). The author also recommends readers to refer to two

works of translations of his poetry into modern languages: Venance Fortunat, *Poèmes*. t. 1, Livres I-IV, t. 2, Livres V-VIII, text edited and translated by M. Reydellet, (Paris, 1994 and 2003); *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems*, translated by J. George, (Liverpool, 1995).

[2] As for the Merovingian royal court, see P. S. Barnwell, *Kings, Courtiers & Imperium. The Barbarian West, 565-725*, (London, 1997), pp. 5-53.

[3] Cf. P. Goubert, *Chronologie des lettres austrasiennes*, in *Mélanges d'histoire du Moyen Âge dédiés à la mémoire de Louis Halphen*, (Paris, 1951), pp. 293-295 ; *Byzance avant Islam. Byzance et l'Orient sous les successeurs de Justinien*, t. 2, *Byzance et les Francs*, (Paris, 1956).

[4] On the social function of the Merovingian hagiography, cf. the pioneering book written by Czech medievalist F. Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit*, (Prague, 1965); B. Voss, *Berührungen von Hagiographie und Historiographie in der Spätantike, Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, Bd. 4, 1966, pp. 291-310 and particularly the synthesizing work of M. Van Uytendaele, *Stylisation biblique et condition humaine dans l'hagiographie mérovingienne (600-750)*, (Bruxelles, 1987).

[5] M. Heinzlmann et J.-Cl. Poulin, *Les Vies anciennes de sainte Geneviève de Paris. Études critiques*, (Paris, 1986).

[6] A. Jacobs, *Géographie de Grégoire de Tours. Le pagus et l'administration en Gaule*, (Paris, 1858) ; M. Vieillard-Troiekourov, *Les monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les oeuvres de Grégoire de Tours*, (Paris, 1976) ; M. Weidemann, *Kulturgeschichte der Merowingerzeit nach den Werken Gregors von Tours*, 2 vols, (Mainz, 1982).

tween the Merovingian kings and the emperors; letters commonly known as *Epistulae Austrasiacae*, or perhaps, one can refer to the letters of the kingdom's prelates written under different circumstances and for various purposes.<sup>[3]</sup> The former provide less information on the affairs that took place within the kingdom but focus instead on the diplomatic relations between the two political entities. The latter, written by the people of the Church, often provide details that lack any historical context but nonetheless allow us to appreciate the importance of facts recounted in great detail.

We clearly can never ignore the most characteristic form of Merovingian literature par excellence, i.e. the Lives of the Saints.<sup>[4]</sup> Even if the said Lives had been written in greater numbers in the seventh century, and granted that from a historical perspective, the Lives of Saints written in that same century are far more interesting, we shall nevertheless turn our attention to a select number of sixth century hagiographic works. Let's recall the valuable work published twenty years ago by M. Heinzlmann and J.-Cl. Poulin that renders the Life of St. Genevieve of Paris its historicity having placed the writing style within the last half of the fifth century.<sup>[5]</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have studies much alike on the Lives of Saints in the sixth century, unless we take into account of the contemporary hagiographic works written by Venance Fortunat.

Here is a quick overview of the state of historical sources which we possess at present that allow us to study sixth century Gaul society, behind the lens of the exceptionally rich content that defines the narrative of the *Books of Histories* of Gregory of Tours. It is not surprising that many successive generations of historians have presented this text as a "mine to be explored" in order to find the evidence required for their own reconstruction of sixth century society, considering the anemic record of the narrative texts from that time.<sup>[6]</sup> However an essential issue emerges here; i.e. the issue of methodology which is inextricably linked to the source and where all historical work rests on. Therefore, since the *Books of Histories* of Gregory of Tours forms a semi-exclusive historical source, how can we then attempt to elaborate an entirely different image of the past than that which we are forced to appreciate? How can we free ourselves from such pressure, when we have no other contemporary source that would otherwise allow us to put things into the perspective, to deny or confirm Gregory's words? Here is the fundamental challenge that all the medievalists must constantly account for when conducting research on the sixth century.

To avoid reaching dead ends, I suggest the deconstruction of the text in the *Books of Histories* of Gregory of Tours. The present concern is how a text can be deconstructed. One method would be to reconstruct the text that its author did not dare to effectively express, for whichever reason, but where we can sense the significance, according to all forms and circumstances. I'd like to call this "the silence in words".

To avoid any confusion or misunderstanding, allow me to clarify what I refer to when I say "silence in words". Silence in words is absolutely not the mere absence of such and such sentence or statement. Instead, it's this gap that we could not reasonably accept as simple ignorance or lack of attention. This is a silence that is consciously and intentionally produced by Gregory, who conceals from his reader certain underlying messages of his narrative. This imaginary part of the text is of a strategic nature and should make it possible to highlight the real subject of the speech, buried in depth under the words printed on various matters.

Consequently, under this perspective I shall delve into three chapters of the

*Books of Histories*, which are spread among different parts of the said work, but which in my opinion are chained together by their protagonists and flow of affairs.

#### A TAX AFFAIR IN TOURS IN 589

[7] For all of the relevant details concerning the events in 589, refer to Greg. Turon. *Historiarum*. lib. IX, c. 30, M.G.SRM. 1, pars 1. fsc. 2, pp. 448-449. As for the time of arrival of the delegation, it is said reported that the senior members of it spent the Saint Martin's day at Tours. We assume that the day belongs to the celebration of ordination of the saint to the episcopal *cathedra* of Tours as has been supposed by Bruno Krusche in his edition of *Monumenta*, namely on the 4th July, cf. *Libri de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, lib. IV, c.6, M.G. SRM. 1, pars 2, pp. 200-201 and a translated text by R. van Dam in his book entitled *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, (Princeton, 1993), pp. 286-287.

[8] " ...id est Florentianum maiorem domus reginae et Romulfus palatii sui comitem, ...", *ibid.* p. 448.

[9] " Multi enim ex his defuncti fuerant, et ob hoc viduis orfanisque ac debilibus tributis pondus insiderat.", *ibid.*

[10] About his character and his unfavourable bearing against the autonomic aspects that were enjoyed by the monastery of Sainte Radegonde, see G. Scheibelreiter, " Königstöchter im Kloster. Radegunde (+587) und der Nonnenaufstand von Poitiers (589)", *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, t. 87, 1979, pp. 1-37, *passim*. He might have had a harsh and stubborn personality.

[11] Greg. Turo. *Historiarum*. lib. VII, c. 24, *ibid.* p. 344.

[12] Gregory cites the whole body of the text of the agreement between an uncle and his nephew in *Histoires*. See Greg. Turo. *Historiarum*. lib. IX, c. 20, *ibid.* pp. 434-439. Concerning the political meaning of this agreement, refer to H. Grahn-Hoek, *Die fränkische Oberschicht im 6. Jahrhundert. Studien zu ihrer rechtlichen und politischen Stellung*, (Sigmaringen, 1976), pp. 260-263.

[13] " Quod hi discutientis per ordinem relaxantes pauperes ac infirmus, illos quos iustitiae conditio tributarius dabat censo publico subdiderunt." Greg. Turon. *Historiarum*. lib. IX, c. 30, *ibid.* pp. 448-449 ; M. Garaud, " Une révision des rôles de l'impôt personnel tributum capitis en Poitou à l'époque mérovingienne (589), *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest*, 1941, pp. 576-585.

One fine day in the summer of 589, the city of Tours was stunned by the visit of government officials whose purpose was to conduct a tax investigation.<sup>[7]</sup> The mayor of the palace of Queen *Florentianus*, and count *Romulfus* of the same palace, were in charge of this delegation.<sup>[8]</sup> Before coming to Tours, the delegation had gone to Poitiers, under the orders of the Austrasian king Childebert II, accompanied by a troop of palatine officials, in order to conduct a census and to implement a fairer taxation system. According to Gregory of Tours, *Maroveus*, the bishop of Poitiers had lodged a complaint to the king, and this was the root cause for the investigation. *Maroveus* had sent a petition to Childebert II, explaining that due the city's cadastral review having ceased for many years, widows, orphans and the disabled had to pay tax on behalf of deceased taxpayers.<sup>[9]</sup>

*Maroveus*, the Bishop of Poitiers, was a loyal supporter of Austrasian royalty.<sup>[10]</sup> Around 585, when King Guntram had tried to subject this city to the sovereignty of Burgundy, *Maroveus* planned the resistance against Guntram's army, who was willing to ransack the city but without being able to bring it under his rule.<sup>[11]</sup> However, the treaty of Andelot, concluded in 587 between Guntram and Childebert had officially confirmed that the cities of Poitiers as Tours belonged to the kingdom of Austrasia.<sup>[12]</sup> We must therefore place the request of the Poitevin bishop to the king of Austrasia within a context of political relations between the two kingdoms. The arrival of a delegation with *Florentianus* as its leader inaugurated the Austrasian government's takeover of this city that had just entered under its rule.

The royal officials fairly conducted the tax investigation to adjust the weight of the tax burden and they imposed contributions to those who had been exempt of their tax duties without good reason. The poor and the disabled are once again exempt from any tax burden.<sup>[13]</sup> The officials successfully completed the always sensitive task of applying a new tax system. The only task remaining was for them to return to Austrasia and report to the king. However, things didn't go as planned and they headed for Tours.

The delegation changed their plan and decided to go back via Tours, as in Poitiers they had unexpectedly obtained a tax inventory of Tours, where all direct tax imposed on the inhabitants of the city of Tours was logged.

This is a well-known narrative in the *Books of Histories* of Gregory, whose interpretation, especially with regard to the Merovingian tax system, for a long time has been the subject of a great deal of attention.<sup>[14]</sup> Now, with the sudden appearance of the royal delegates in Tours who had come to collect a public tax from its fellow citizens, Bishop Gregory drew up a long speech to dissuade them from carrying out their fiscal assignment. Gregory would then insist that the city of Tours had for a long time been favoured with the privilege of tax exemption from the kings, of which the city of Saint Martin had benefited since Chlothar I. His plea against public taxation in Tours is quoted *in extenso* in the translation of O. M. Dalton, with some modifications:

"It is clear that a register of tax-payers for the city of Tours was made in the reign of King Chlothar, and that the books were taken away to be submitted to the

[14] An ample bibliography on this question can be found in J. Durliat, *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens (284-889)*, (Sigmaringen, 1990), pp. 310-314.

king. But smitten with fear of the holy bishop Martin, he caused them to be burned. After the death of King Chlothar our people took the oath of loyalty to King Charibert, who likewise solemnly swore not to make new laws or customs binding on our people, but to secure to them the same condition under which they had lived in his father's reign; he further promised to inflict no new ordinances upon them which would cause them loss. But Gaiso, then count, took the lists, made, as I have said, by former assessors, and began to exact the tax. He was opposed by Bishop Eufronius, but took the amounts which he had wrongfully collected, and went to the king, to whom he showed the tax inventory in which the sums due were set down. The king, sighing, yet fearing the power of the holy Martin, threw the inventory into the fire and returned the pieces of gold already extorted to the church of the saint, declaring that no citizen of Tours should pay any tax to the royal treasury. After his death King Sigibert possessed this city, but laid no burden of tribute upon it. And Childebert, now in the fourteenth year of his reign, hath likewise exacted nothing, nor hath the city had to groan under the pressure of any taxation. It lieth in your power to assess this tax or not; but be ye ware of the harm that shall ensue if ye prepare to go against the oath of the king.' To this speech of mine they replied: 'Here in our hands is the book in which is entered the tax imposed on the people of Tours.' I retorted: 'This book hath not issued from the royal treasury, nor hath it been valid throughout all these years. There is no reason for surprise if, through the enmities of the citizens, it hath been preserved in the house of some private person. But God shall judge those who, to despoil our city, have produced it after so great a tract of time.' Meanwhile the son of Audinus, who had actually produced the book, caught a fever that very day, and died the next day but one. We then dispatched a mission to the king, petitioning him to send us notice of his commands with regard to this matter. Forthwith a letter was sent confirming the immunity of the people of Tours from all assessment in veneration of the holy Martin. After it had been read, the men who had been sent for this purpose returned home"<sup>[15]</sup>

[15] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated with an introduction by O. M. Dalton, Oxford Clarendon Press, (Oxford, 1927), vol. II, pp. 400-401.

[16] F. Thürlemann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours. Topoi und Wirklichkeit*, Bern, 1974, pp. 74 et seq.

[17] Cf. Libri de virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi, lib. IV, c.7, M.G. SRM, op.cit. p. 201 et R. Van Dam, op.cit. pp. 287-288. It is possible that the purpose of travel to Galicia that assumed Florentianus might have had something to do with the royal coronation of King Miro in 569, on behalf of Childebert. Cf. P. David, *Études historiques sur la Galice et le Portugal du VIe au XIIe siècle*, (Lisboa, 1947), p.68, n.3.

As we have just seen, Gregory had mustered all his will and intelligence to convince the king's officials to abandon tax collection in Tours. Most probably held at the bishop's residence, he vividly describes the direct exchanges he had with the delegates where direct speech is one of the characteristics of the Gregorian narrative style.<sup>[16]</sup> Here, I'm under the impression that this narrative style fully operates as the agent of textual meaning. Gregory wanted to stop the implementation of a new public tax at all costs. However, he had trouble dissuading the tax collectors because they showed him a tax inventory that went against his allegation. Florentianus was a dreadful person, yet a clever diplomat whom Childebert had sent to King Miro in Galicia for an assignment whose subject is unknown.<sup>[17]</sup> Finally, following the petition from Tours it was the hasty granting of the privilege of tax exemption, which saved Gregory whose back was facing the wall. We may believe that Childebert granted this favor thanks to the gratitude he had felt for Gregory's collaboration in concluding the Andelot treaty with Guntram approximately one year prior.

I have digressed for a while on a political matter which took place in 589, and which Gregory of Tours has certainly reconstructed retrospectively. Let us now note that the son of a certain Audinus had handed the former tax inventory to the king's delegates. The question that now emerges is where the royal delegation did discover the existence of the former tax inventory of Tours and how it came into their possession. Did this occur in Tours, or elsewhere? Let's recall that it was at the request of Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers that King Childebert sent a troop of

royal officials to Poitiers. This motion did not start under a royal initiative. It is therefore reasonable to think that this delegation had not intended to visit a city other than Poitiers, and that it was in Poitiers that the said delegation had obtained this essential inventory from the hands of *Audinus'* son. The son and the wrongdoer also died of fever three days after this "crime".

Historians of Merovingian taxation have not ceased to make reference to this story and have given various explanations. One of the recent explanation is that of Jean Durliat, which I summarize: the assignment of the royal envoys of Childebert II in Poitiers was not to collect tax itself, but to conduct a tax assessment, with the aim of updating the tax register. The arrival of the palace people would be a good indicator of this assumption because the tax base materials were to be reserved both for the royal court and for the place where this tax base was used for collection.<sup>[18]</sup> Let's now follow his trail to gain a global understanding on tax revision. Nevertheless, we disagree with his statement that the delegates had not given up on the idea of a new census. The city of Tours, he says, was always subject to public taxation owed according to the former base. Now, in order for his arguments to hold ground, the story on the discovery of the former tax inventory had to be erased in Gregory's account, as a pretext that it was complete fiction. But this is unlikely. It was precisely the discovery of the tax inventory which had brought the royal officials to Tours in the hope of taxing people whereas this city had the opportunity to be exempted for a long time.

The fact that the son of *Audinus* has stolen the tax inventory, in my opinion, is key to understanding the story. Who, then, was *Audinus*? We have to go back by four years to answer this question.<sup>[19]</sup>

[18] Durliat, op. cit. pp. 310-314.

[19] Cf. Greg. Turo. *Historiarum libri*, lib. VII, c. 47. *ibid.* pp.366-368.

#### TRIGGER AND SPREAD OF BLOODY STRUGGLES: THE SICHAR FEUD IN 585

Four years before the arrival of the tax assessing delegation in Tours, a series of particularly violent armed conflicts took place between two Tourangeau clans; Sichar was the leader of one of the two clans. He was a young warrior of barely twenty years of age, whose reputation was unparalleled by his daring actions and cruelty; we can consider him among the anti-heroes in the *Books of Histories* of Gregory of Tours.<sup>[20]</sup> Gregory voluntarily took on the significant responsibility of appeasing the tensions between the two opposing parties and thus bringing them to peace, and as bishop of the city he became the most prestigious of all Gaul bishops thanks to the fame of Saint Martin, one of his predecessors.<sup>[21]</sup> It was all the more serious that Gregory had asked King Sigebert I, during his coronation in 573, to grant him the right to elect a city count, to whom he would ask to take an oath of fidelity to the bishop himself.<sup>[22]</sup> As we shall see later, he must have ensured peace among the two hostile clans through a judicial settlement in which he mediated them in a quite subtle manner. We must never fail to consider that this text is the testimony of a man who was actively involved in ending the conflict in question.

As previously, we refer to the Dalton translation, chapter 47 of Book VII of *The History of the Franks*:

*"A cruel feud now arose between citizens of Tours. While Sichar, the son of one John, deceased, was celebrating the feast of Christmas in the village of Manthellan,<sup>[23]</sup> with Austregisel and other people of the district, the local priest sent a servant to invite several persons to drink wine with him at his house. When the servant came, one of the invited drew his sword and was brutal enough to strike, so that the*

[20] At the dawn of modern positivist historiography G. Monod, *Aventures de Sichar*, *Revue Historique*, t. 31, 1886, pp. 259-290, treated the question of these interpretations all through the history of Sichar. More recently, two following studies were produced at the occasion of the international colloquium about the revenge in the early and central Middle Ages: Ph. Depreux, "Une faide exemplaire? À propos des aventures de Sichaire: vengeance et pacification aux temps mérovingiens" in *La vengeance, 400-1200*, direct. par D. Barthélemy, F. Bougard et R. Le Jan, (Rome, 2006), pp.65-85; P. Geary, "Gabriel Monod, Fustel de Coulanges et les «aventures de Sichaire»: la naissance de l'histoire scientifique au XIXe siècle", *ibid.* pp.87-99.

[21] For more precise details of the city of Tours at the time of the episcopal reign of Gregory, see L. Piétri, *La ville de Tours du IVe au VIe siècle. Naissance d'une cité chrétienne*, (Rome, 1983), pp. 247-334. I would place an

emphasis on the remarks and criticism proposed by Ian Wood against the view that in the Merovingian times, Tours' prestigious standing was already established. See I. Wood, *The Individuality of Gregory of Tours, The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. K. Mitchell / I. Wood, (Leyde / Boston / Cologne), 2002, pp. 34 et seq.

[22] M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours. History and Society in the Sixth Century*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 40.

[23] As to Manthelan, see *Des paroisses de Touraine aux communes d'Indre-et-Loire. La formation des territoires*, sous la direction d'Elisabeth Zadora-Rio, (Tours, 2008), passim.

[24] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. p. 321.

[25] E.R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinische Mittelalter*, 2nd ed. (Bern, 1954), pp.158-159, E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, 3rd ed. (Bern / München, 1964), pp.78seq.

[26] "De hinc cum in iudicio civium convenissent et praeceptum esset, ut Austrigiselus, qui homicida erat et, interfectis pueris, res sine audientia diripuerat, ...", Greg. Turo. *Historiarum*, lib. VII, c.47, op.cit. p. 322.

[27] "...initio placito, paucis infra diebus Sicharius audiens, quod res, quas Austrigiselus diripuerat, cum Aunone et filio adque eius fratre Eberulfo retinerentur, postposito placito, coniunctus Audino, mota seditione, cum armatis viris inruit super eos nocte, elisumque hospicium, in quo dormiebant, patrem cum fratre et filio interemit resque eorum cum pecoribus, interfectisque servis, abduxit.", *ibid.* p. 322.

[28] "... Et haec dicens, optuli argentum aeclesiae redemitur; sed pars Chramnesindiquae mortem patris fratrisque et patrii requirebat, accipere noluit." *ibid.* p.322.

*man fell dead upon the spot. Sichar was bound by ties of friendship to the priest; and as soon as he heard of the servant's murder he seized his weapons and went to the church to wait for Austregisel. He in his turn, hearing of this, took up his arms and equipment and went out against him. There was an encounter between the two parties; in the general confusion Sichar was brought safely away by some clerics, and escaped to his country estate, leaving behind in the priest's house money and raiment, with four wounded servants. After his flight, Austregisel burst into house, slew the servants, and carried off the gold and silver and other property.*<sup>[24]</sup>

This was the first phase of the clashes. We can already identify the particularly sharp literary style that Gregory uses to depict the scenes of struggles and describe how the feud evolved, leaving the reader with goosebumps. Indeed, the pen that outlines this bloody event is full of that dark glow. And the description is so much appreciated and admired by E. R. Curtius and E. Auerbach, great modern masters of Latin literature, as if it were a mirror reflecting the realities of a society at the time.<sup>[25]</sup>

After this horrible act of crime was committed, together with multiple murders, a legal plea was summoned to Tours to sentence Austregisel, who had to be punished for his crimes.<sup>[26]</sup> It must be highlighted here that the court was not in a position to issue a sentence without a detailed investigation of what had happened and before both parties had been heard. The court was in fact an arbitration tribunal and therefore the trial took some time to settle on a ruling. In the meantime, an incident occurred which launched the second phase of the chain of acts of revenge: knowing that the goods extracted by force by the hands of Austregisel had been held under the roof of a certain Aunon and his son, as well as the latter's brother Eberulf, Sichar attacked and killed them together with his warriors and with the help of Audin during the night, before walking away with the goods. These goods were the cause Austregisel had committed this crime.<sup>[27]</sup>

Gregory was furious because Sichar had made him lose face by neglecting the agreement established under his own initiative and authority. I would like to point out here that there came another aspect to the fore of this power confrontation with full of acts of violence. Instead of the confrontation between the party of Sichar and that of Austregisel a plan rendering Sichar against Chramnesind, another son of Aunon, now surfaced. However, Gregory does not mention the relationship he had with Austregisel. There is no doubt that Chramnesind's father, Aunon, had a parental relationship with Austregisel, though the accuracy of the latter is not confirmed.

Now, according to the law of the *audientia episcopalis*, that is the arbitrating role of the bishop assisted by a *judex*, i.e. local court judge (probably the *comes civitatis* in Tours), Gregory sent people to both parties to summon them to reconciliation in court and thus put an end to the violence. It was now Chramnesind, son of the late Aunon, who became the leader of the clan against Sichar. In spite of all Gregory's efforts, who had drawn a sum of money from the church treasury to settle Sichar's financial penalties, Chramnesind would refuse to accept peace.<sup>[28]</sup> We know that the Church of Tours, with Gregory in charge, was very eager to restore peace in the region, and that was of utmost importance for the Church and he was willing to grant compensation money to Sichar.

Arbitration did not succeed and the two parties left the court separately. It goes without saying that Sichar then became a target for Chramnesind in the act of revenge. This explains why Sichar had gone to see his wife, who lived in a *villa* in Poitou, before joining the king, for whom he hoped to provide protection

for his own safety against possible attacks from avengers. During his stay in the Poitevine property, an incident occurred: Sichar had been injured by a slave who was angry because of a very severe punishment Sichar had inflicted on him. The news of this incident suddenly spread and arrived in Tours though it was not the fact: instead of being wounded, Sichar should have been dead. This triggered the third phase of the clash.

When Chramnesind heard the rumor, it was not long before he and his parents and friends mounted the assault on Sichar's house, a *villa* near Tours. They ravaged the house, killed servants and set homes on fire after having looted a herd of cattle.<sup>[29]</sup> For the third time, the judicial assembly was summoned to listen to the two opposing parties and force them to put an end to the hostilities. Let us quote once more the relevant passages in Dalton's translation:

*"The parties were now summonsed by the count to the city, and pleaded their own causes. The judges decided that he who had already refused a composition and then burned houses down should forfeit half of the sum formerly awarded to him, wherein they acted illegally, to ensure the restoration of peace; they further ordered that Sichar should pay the other moiety of the composition. The Church then provided the sum named in the judgement; the parties gave security, and the composition was paid, both sides promising each other upon oath that they would never make further trouble against each other. So the feud came to an end"*<sup>[30]</sup>

Now that revenge has been fully executed, there was no reason for Chramnesind not to make peace with Sichar, granted the pressure was imposed by the civil government, which was responsible for peace in the city of Tours. For this reason Chramnesind accepted the arbitration proposed by the judges, although the amount of compensation that Sichar was to grant Chramnesind was reduced by half compared to what had been offered before. Let's recall that it was the Church of Tours, and not Sichar, who had paid compensation to Chramnesind. Indeed, it was the Church of Tours, and therefore Gregory as bishop, who had orchestrated all the pre-requisites intending to establish peace with subtlety.

There is another component that is extremely important to better understanding of the flow of events in this story. This concerns the security charter. As we saw earlier in the quoted passages of Gregory of Tours, Sichar had obtained a safety charter, in exchange for the financial compensation. It was forbidden to turn against the holder of such a document. The charter is an integral part of the peace making process and characteristic to the settlement of vindictive disputes.

Unfortunate is the fact that we no longer have such a document at our disposal, because once the holder dies, there is no longer any reason to safeguard it from loss. Fortunately, however, there are different formularies that inform us of the content of such a safety charter. The oldest of these are those found in the Anjou or Marculfi formularies, which date from the last half of the seventh century;<sup>[31]</sup> but, since these are almost identical, it is best to refer here to the method found in the formulary of Tours. Even if published at a later date, this is nevertheless more trustworthy, I suppose, as it reflects the tradition of the region of Tours where the Sichar feud took place.

The Tours safety charter begins with the following address: *Fratri illo ego enim ille.*<sup>[32]</sup> Which quotes:

*"As everyone is aware, a few days ago, at the request of an enemy, of my brother, or relative, you committed murder, and later you admitted to the fact and you have come to give your defense, in my presence, before the judge, and to fully explain the death of my relative, and you have granted sums of money, as agreed. For this rea-*

[29] "Interm sonus in Toronicum exiit, Sicharium fuisse defunctum. Cum autem haec Chramnesindus audisset, commonitis parentibus et amicis, ad domum eius properat. Quibus spoliatis, interemptis nonnullis servorum, domus omnes tam Sichari quam reliquorum, qui participes huius villae erant, incendio concremavit, abducens secum pecora vel quaecumque movere potuit." *ibid.* p.322-323

[30] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. p.323.

[31] *Formulae Andecavense*, n.5 and n.6; *Marculfi Formularum Liber II*, no. 18, MG. *LL. Formulae*, t.1, pp.6-7, 88-89.

[32] *Formulae Turonenses*, n.38, *ibid.*; p. 156.

son, I have decided to issue you this safety charter so that you, and all other persons living under your roof, shall not fear any accusations or claims for this murder from myself or from my heirs, or from any enemy or envoy, and as such live safely in all your belongings. However if anyone, be it myself, one of my heirs, or anyone else, dares to go against this charter or oppose it and if anyone who has not been stopped by me or my heirs, or the person initiating the quarrel pays the tax to the fiscal treasurer generously, all claims are without any effect, and any complaint is for this reason and at all times rejected equally from me and my heirs. And this safety charter, together with its clauses, is approved with my signature or that of the elders, and shall never be repealed in the future.”<sup>[33]</sup>

[33] “Dum et omnibus habetur percognitum, qualiter tu ante hos dies, instigante adversario, germano meo, vel quolibet parente, interfecisti, unde et postea ex hoc conprobatus apparuisti, et ante me apud illum iudicem exinde in rationes fuisti et pro integra compositione pro iam dicto parente meo pro ipsa morte, sicut mihi bene conplacuit, argentum soledos tantos dedisti: ideo hanc epistolam securitatis tibi ex hoc emittendam decrevi, ut neque a me neque ab heredibus meis neque a quolibet opposita vel emissa persona nullam calumniam neque repetitionem de iam dicto homicidio habere non pertimiscas, neque tu neque nullus de parte tua, qui tecum commorantur, sed ducti atque securi in omnibus exinde valeatis residere. Si quis vero, si fuerit aut ego ipse aut ullus de heredibus meis seu quislibet persona, qui contra hanc securitatem venire aut agere vel refragare temptaverit, et a me vel ab heredibus meis defensatum non fuerit, sociante fisco, qui litem intulerit soledos tantos componat, et sua repetitio nullum obteneat effectum, sed sit inter nos vel heredibus nostris ex hac re omnique tempore calcanda causatio. Et haec securitas meis vel bonorum hominum manibus roborata cum stipulatione inserta diuturno tempore maneat inconvulsa”. *ibid.*

[34] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. pp.387-388.

[35] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. p. 387.

It is very likely that the security charter signed by Chramnesind was similar to that contained in the formulary of Tours, drawn up in the eighth century. Having received the sum in addition to delivering this document, Chramnesind was obliged to give up any intent of revenge for the brutal deaths of his father, brother and uncle. Together with Sichar, they were finally forced to swear never to quarrel with one another ever again. Thus a series of violent conflicts that shook the whole of Tours society came to an end.

I would like to believe that this was a victory for Gregory, who had tried at all costs to stop the brutality, however, behind this apparent success, hatred and hostility were still sprouting.

### THREE YEARS LATER...

The peace restored through the bitter efforts of the bishop and the civil government of Tours was not permanent, and according to Gregory, violent conflict between Sichar and Chramnesind “resumed with a new rage of violence” in 588.<sup>[34]</sup> It is important to note that this rage took place precisely one year before the arrival in Tours of the delegation in charge of tax investigation, led by *Florentianus*. This arrival was in fact strangely linked to a new confrontation between Chramnesind and Sichar, something that has never been noticed thus far when studying the *Historiarum libri decem*. Once again, we refer to Dalton’s translation to show how the hatred between the two warriors of Tours broke out after three years of interval (Book IX, Chapter 19):

“After the murder of the kinsfolk of Chramnesind, Sichar formed a great friendship with him; so fond of one another did they grow that often they shared each other’s meals and slept in the same bed. One evening Chramnesind made ready a supper, and invited Sichar. His friend came, and they sat down together to the feast. But Sichar, letting the wine go to his head, kept making boastful remarks against Chramnesind, and is reported at last to have said: ‘Sweet brother, thou owest me great thanks for the slaying of thy relation; for the composition made to thee for their death hath caused gold and silver to abound in thy house. But for this cause, which established thee not a little, thou wert this day poor and destitute.’ Chramnesind heard these words with bitterness of heart, and said within himself: ‘If I avenge not the death of my kinsmen, I deserve to lose the name of man, and to be called weak woman.’ And straightway he put out the lights and cleft the head of Sichar with his dagger. The man fell and died, uttering but a faint sound as the last breath left him”<sup>[35]</sup>

It is essential to note the conduct of Chramnesind after he committed the murder of Sichar. As he often does in his writings, Gregory describes how Chramnesind tried to make up for this irreparable mistake but did so pithily without

sufficiently explaining the reason or the situation the lead player found himself in. Here is a glimpse:

*“Chramnesind stripped the body of its garments, and hung it from a post of his fence; he then rode away to the king. Entering the church, he prostrated himself at the king’s feet, and said: ‘I ask of thee my life, most glorious king, for I have slain men who secretly did to death my kinsmen and plundered all their possessions.’ He then set forth the whole matter in due order. But Queen Brunhild took it exceeding ill that Sichar, who was under her protection, should have thus been slain, and broke into a fury against Chramnesind, who, seeing that she was set against him, gained the village of Bourges in the territory of Bourges, where his kinsmen lived, because it counted to the kingdom of Guntram. Tranquilla, wife of Sichar, left her children and her husband’s property in Tours and Poitiers, where she married again.”<sup>[36]</sup>*

[36] *Ibid.* pp.387-388.

When Chramnesind removed the clothes from Sichar’s body and then hung it on a stake – rather than on a branch, as in Dalton’s translation – he undoubtedly followed a custom of German origin according to which anyone claiming the legitimacy of a murder and intending to take an oath of purity in a court case, was to expose to the public the naked corpse to show that the one who had been killed was guilty of violating the peace. This arrangement in those days was performed quickly soon after a murder was committed to avoid the risk of being charged with concealment of murder, which was the subject of a more serious charge.<sup>[37]</sup> Let us not ignore that Chramnesind was a man clever enough to hide all traces in order to conceal the crime scene from the eyes of a number of eyewitnesses. It all happened in complete darkness. Nevertheless, he may still be considered as a victim of an eruption of anger provoked by the insults of Sichar.

[37] Cf. *Lex Salica*, § 41, 2; *Lex Ribuarica*, § 80(77), *M.G. LL*, Sectio 1, t. 4, pars 2, p.115; t. 3, pars 2, p.129. Concerning the clauses stipulating that a crime committed concealdly was considered worse and the fine to be paid to the kinsmen of the victim higher when the perpetrator hid the corpse of homicide victim. Cf. also J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History*, (London, 1962), pp.141-142.

According to Gregory, Chramnesind immediately left the scene of this bloody tragedy to go and explain his action and ask King Childebert II to forgive him. I wonder, though, whether Chramnesind rode alone and was confident that he would be able to meet the king in order to defend himself and explain the legitimacy of his murderous act. I’ll allow myself here to be a little more daring and to launch a seemingly necessary, though uncalled, assumption to fill the information gaps and thus bring it to fruition. It is highly likely that Chramnesind sought Gregory’s advice immediately after Sichar’s assassination, as he had killed Sichar in a moment of violent passion and he did not know how to deal with the tragic situation he had caused.

It was therefore better for Chramnesind to ask for the bishop’s help who had assumed, three years prior, to settle the conflicts between the two clans and had every interest in preventing the acts of revenge that could have emerged from this murder. As he faced a man who was clearly in distress, Gregory the peace keeper, could quite possibly have thought that eradicating the contagion of endless conflicts was a must, at any price and for good. He would have thus reacted without delay and in the interest of Chramnesind because Sichar was now dead. The bishop could have suddenly taken the decision to abandon his position of neutral mediator between the two parties and in this case to act in favor of Chramnesind.

In my opinion, the Bishop of Tours gave Chramnesind a letter of recommendation which in turn gave Chramnesind a greater chance of direct access to the King in order to defend his position, or perhaps Gregory offered him one or more chaperones who could support him in the royal court. Despite the strategic steps carefully taken by the bishop, Chramnesind’s first contact with the king did not bear fruit because of opposition expressed by Queen Brunehaut, to whom Sichar

had been the protégé, as read in Gregory's account. For the queen, Chramnesind was, for whatever reason, the murderer of the darling person she favored. It was impossible for Chramnesind not to be punished. Perhaps, still under the guidance of the bishop, Chramnesind had taken shelter in Burgundy, at his parents, until Gregory was able to convince the king to grant the latter a royal pardon in Chramnesind's favor. If Chramnesind was able to acquire the right to present himself before the king and to again have the possibility to ask for forgiveness, this then regards an act of *lobbying*, i.e. a subtle arrangement made by the bishop of Tours. Moreover, when he writes "*Sichar was about twenty years of age when he died. In life he was a light fellow, wine-bibber and man-slayer, who did violence to many in his drunkenness*",<sup>[38]</sup> it is very likely that these were the exact words he used to convince the king.

[38] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. p. 388.

But there is yet another element worth discussing, which is just as important for our intention. This is the *post-mortem* story of Sichar, or more precisely that of the deceased's wife. Her name was Tranquille, the bearer of Sichar's children, and was the owner of properties in Touraine and Poitou. She had lived with her children on her property in Poitou.<sup>[39]</sup> According to Gregory, after the death of her husband, she returned to her parents' home in the Troyes region to remarry, leaving behind her children and assets.<sup>[40]</sup> Now, what became of the abandoned children? Were they considered orphans to be raised by monastic order? This assumption is unlikely. The children of the deceased leader of a warrior clan were not to be treated like ordinary children of laypeople who saw hopelessness in their future. It is possible that supporters of the Sichar clan took charge of raising them in a villa previously owned by their leader. After the fall of Sichairian rule, many of these supporters had to move their operations to this region of Poitou, whose precise location unfortunately escapes us. I suppose *Audinus'* son, whose father belonged to Sichar's clan, was also among the supporters, who had joined Sichar during his nocturnal intrusion into the house of Chramnesind's father and participated in the mass killing.<sup>[41]</sup> It is necessary to take into account the Sichairian clan's move to the Poitou location and, it is in this context that one should perhaps understand the slightly suspicious behavior of Sichar's widow.

[39] "His discentibus, Sicharius iter, ut ad regem ambularet, praeparat, et ob hoc Pectavum ad uxorem cernendam proficiscitur.", Greg. Turo. Historiarum. lib. VII, c.47, MG. SRM. t. 1, pars 1, p. 367.

[40] Cf. Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire des Francs*, trans., par R. Latouche, nouvelle édition, Les Belles Lettres, (Paris,1999), (vol.2) p. 205 and n. 33. In this note, Latouche relies on solely August Longnon's identification of *vicus Mauriopes*.

[41] Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, op. cit. p.322.

To end this part of the account on Sichar's death and its ensuing unfolding, a series of judicial and administrative proceedings should be noted concerning the return of Chramnesind's assets, which the Merovingian state had seized on the order of Brunehaut. I would like to immediately point out how the state system worked at the time, and why it was normal to seize the property of Chramnesind. The judicial system considered him a murderer and as such seized his property. Consequently, a reversal of state opinion, namely the return of seized property, turns out to be an unexpected, irregular intervention upon the decision of the state facility, and this is what Gregory of Tours managed to achieve for the benefit of Childebert II.

It is interesting to note that this State does have a seemingly well-established procedure. First of all, Chramnesind met Flavian *domesticus* at the royal court who was in charge of the management of the royal treasury, in which the seized property was legally incorporated.<sup>[42]</sup> Flavian returned the assets under a legal title, which had to be a kind of *rescriptum*, as in the imperial era.<sup>[43]</sup> Chramnesind then sought the guidance of a certain *Aginus*, perhaps a duke who ruled the district of Touraine, in order to request the return of his property's full ownership.<sup>[44]</sup>

[42] About the function administrative that a *domesticus* took charge of, see A. Carlot, *Étude sur le domesticus franc*, (Liège, 1903).

[43] Cf. P. Classen, *Kaiserreskript und Königsurkunde. Diplomatische Studien zum Problem der Kontinuität zwischen Altertum und Mittelalter*, (Thessaloniki, 1977), pp. 16-41.

This is the final chapter in the conflict resolution process, where the two clans of Tours fought each other in a bloody and cruel manner, and which Greg-

[44] Greg. Turo. Historiarum, lib. IX, c.19, *op. cit.* p. 388.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] E. James, "beati pacifici": bishops and the Law in Sixth-Century Gaul, ed. J. Bossy, *Disputes and Settlements. Law and Human Relations in the West*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 25.

ory often describes in a manner that makes us shiver.

Yet there is still another item to discuss, undoubtedly the most important issue for our intended purpose: *epistolam eius elicuit, ut a nullo contingeretur*.<sup>[45]</sup> The security charter that guaranteed him protection against any possible attack.

#### REVENGE ON GREGORY HIMSELF?

Should our assumption be confirmed, that Gregory took more or less subtle action in person to recover the peace in Tours, by convincing among others, Austrasian royalty and by negotiating with public order officials to provide Chramnesind a security charter emanating from royal authority, instead of disputes, should exempt him from all claims, it is clear that hostility or hate was felt by the supporters of the Sichar clan against the very person who had worked to settle the conflicts, namely against Gregory who had taken over the role of the good shepherd of the *beati pacifici* in Tours.<sup>[46]</sup> In the political culture of the sixth century Franco-Roman warriors in Gaul, the right of revenge belonged to a code of honor that must be followed to save face, and therefore one's honor. Preventing the exercise of such a right would have provoked a fierce frustration in the victims' clan, which would have quickly transformed into hatred towards anyone who had attempted to obtain the royal pardon for Chramnesind and thus granting him personal security.

All that we have described above happened a year before the arrival of the royal delegation in charge of the tax investigation in Tours in 589. As we mentioned above, this feud was at the source of this unexpected visit of a group of tax officials from the Austrasian kingdom in Tours: the handover of a former tax register of Tours, which made possible immediate tax collection, or at the very least the revision of the former register in order to quickly carry out tax collection thereafter. The one who handed over this former tax inventory of Tours to a leader of the delegation at Poitiers was the son of a certain *Audinus*, who was one of Sichar's friends. In my opinion, this presumption corresponds perfectly to the circumstances following the settlement of the conflicts between Sichar and Austregisil-Chramnesind.

The arrival of the royal delegates was, so to speak, the result of the combination of two sets of circumstances: the first was the objective of the delegation of tax auditors and the second was the sequence of struggles between the two Tours clans. The merging point therefore is the son of *Audinus*, where both the tax structure and the political culture of revenge met and rooted in this region at the end of the sixth century. The crucial question is therefore, why did *Audinus'* anonymous son, having stolen the former tax inventory of Tours, give it to the mayor of the palace of the Queen of Austrasia? Whatever the reason was reason and to what extent the inventory's handover was made, thus granting the state power to collect taxes could have been a revenge against Bishop Gregory. Among the possibilities, the risk of the bishop is losing the right to tax exemption. It was a final and effective objective, which could have had serious consequences on the finances of the church of Tours. The latter had enjoyed tax exemption for quite a long time, which enabled the church to hold all income received by way of public taxation. This was not a case of increasing public taxation as a result of a simple census. It could be demanded that arrears be returned to the Royal Tax Authority of Austrasia for previous years.

When Gregory of Tours had realized that it was he, himself who had been

[47] "Non est mirum enim, si pro inimicitia horum civium in cuiuscumque domo reservatus.", Greg. Turo. Historiarum. lib IX, c. 30, op. cit. p. 449. I would stress here the rightfulness of the identification that I have tried, concerning the son of a certain Audinus and a son of the person who attacked the residence belonging to the clan of Chramnesind at Tours. M. Heinzelmann developed in his remarkable study cited above (see n. 22) his own interpretation about the arrival of the Austrasian delegation of *Florentianus* at Tours for the sake of the fiscal inquiry. He doesn't take account however of the historical background in Tours of which the major political scenery had been dominated by the Sicharien affair from a few years back, and he identifies only marginal activities within the magistrate entity of Tours. It seems to me that an application of the word "civium" corresponds completely with the semantic point of view to an expression for which Gregory himself used in livre VII, chapitre 47, in order to account for a series of bloody confrontations between the two hostile clans; "*Gravia tunc inter Toronicos cives bella civilia surexerunt*".

the target of revenge, and had understood the subtlety and perversity of *Audinus* son's plan, he must have been terrified. The words he uttered to *Florentianus* and his officials, *pro inimicitia horum civium*<sup>[47]</sup> ("because of the hostilities of these inhabitants of Tours"), were the very words of someone who understood the underlying motivation of the craftsman who devised this disaster. That's why he tried so hard to convince the tax officials, who came from afar, to give up tax collection in Tours. The stake of this bitter effort was, truly, to reinforce the prestige and the popularity of the Bishop of Tours, which had to act as a defender of interests and benefactor to the loyal Tours inhabitants. The bishop was therefore in a very difficult situation even before Childebert had ordered *Florentianus* to give up tax collection in the city of Tours. It is more than likely that the death following a malignant fever of which the son of *Audinus* was a victim, was fiction, and this may be consistent with the fact that Gregory refrained from mentioning the name of the son of *Audinus*. His dislike against *Audinus*' son is representing his fear to the danger that this person had subjected him.

### CONCLUSION

We have attempted to identify what Gregory was hastened to account in details in his *Books of Histories* and to reveal the reasons he kept in silence. I believe that this silence covered two aspects that, though at the beginning were mutually exclusive, yet interrelated due to a desire for revenge: the first was Gregory's subtle intervention to interrupt the vicious cycle of revenge, and the second was the tax system that the people of Merovingian kingdoms had to endure. It is suitable to add here an additional analysis to better define this last aspect. What Gregory did not allude in his speeches addressed to the delegation was the complex relationship between tax exemption and tax collection by the Church of Tours, by way of the charitable alms. Even though both aspects were in fact like two sides of the same coin, and integral to one another, Gregory presented these in his speech as two distinct entities, without hinting at any real relation between them. Tax exemption had not been manifested at a people level that would otherwise grant them the complete and total freedom from the tax burden. Common laymen perhaps were requested to pay a moderate portion – probably a tenth of their income and/or resources to the Church. As the head of the Church, Gregory refrained from talking about this matter all together. This payment of a pseudo tax to the Church should not be considered as a corollary to a tax system but as a voluntary gift contributed under the impetus of the charitable spirit. The son of *Audinus* knew how to benefit from the Church's state of puzzlement.

As we suggested above, the "silence in words" framework takes root at the crossroad between Sichar's violent affair and that of the arrival of the delegation of tax assessment in Tours. When looking behind the lens of this fictional text, questions emerge when reading the *Books of Histories*. On the one hand there is a perspective that shifts from that of Gregory, and on the other hand we are therefore able to somehow free ourselves from the curse casted on Gregory.

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