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Allen E. Jones, *Death and Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours: Religion and Society in Late Antique Gaul*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 324 pp. €109.00. (hb). ISBN 9789462988040; €108.99. (eb). ISBN 9789048540082.

Review by Ian Wood, University of Leeds.

Although Allen Jones presents this volume as offering a new reading of Gregory of Tours, in many ways it is a biographical study that offers a useful summary of current understanding. True, Jones is unusual in placing Death (which is conceived of as a character) at the heart of his reading by linking the main phases in Gregory's life and intellectual and spiritual development to the deaths of important contemporaries and relatives, up to the moment of his establishment as bishop. Yet, the resulting narrative is effectively the same but writ large, with a good deal more anecdotal evidence drawn from the bishop's hagiographical writings, as that offered by Raymond Van Dam, who linked Gregory's development to a series of personal crises in his 1993 volume, *Saints and their Miracles*.^[1] This biographical structure, however, is less apparent in the second half of Jones's study. There is surprisingly little on Gregory's conflict with Leudast or his trial at Berny-Rivière. There are moments when Jones returns to Gregory's own story, but these are not given much structural importance, with the exception of the civil wars of 574-576, and in particular the murder of Sigibert, which Jones sees as the spur for the composition of the first four Books of Gregory's *Histories*. This is entirely plausible. A.C. Murray's dating of individual chapters of Gregory's work has never proved that the *Histories* were entirely composed at the end of the bishop's life, merely that he revised his work up to the very end, as Jones argues.^[2]

The focus of the second part of the book is rather an analysis of Gregory's descriptions of the deaths of saints, sinners, and kings, emphasizing the pastoral nature of the narrative, and pointing up the vocabulary employed. The discussion of Gregory's depiction of royal deaths is particularly sharp, although there might have been more reference to the *De cursu stellarum*, which suggests a different reading of the deaths of Chlothar and Sigibert. To a large extent, however, all this is a rearrangement of the stories set down by Gregory himself, even full accounts of individual reigns (sometimes repeating what has been already stated), with relatively little additional analysis.

On occasion Jones pauses to show how Gregory has altered his sources, with telling results. He shows, for instance, how Gregory alters the wording of Paulinus of Périgueux and Remigius of Reims. It is a pity that such moments in Jones's work are relatively rare. The result is that we are given a very good, close reading of Gregory, but one that does not really place Gregory within an overall history of the development of Christian ideas. Jones offers a modification of

Martin Heinzelmann's Augustinian reading of Gregory, without much reference to wider discussions of the impact of Augustine.[3] It is striking that no work of Robert Markus appears in the bibliography since, for many, *The End of Ancient Christianity* is a central work of interpretation.[4] With regard to Gregory's view of death and the afterlife, one would like to know to what extent the bishop of Tours was merely expressing current views and to what extent he was changing them. This has been considered by Isabel Moreira (as Jones hints), but there is surely more to be said.[5] Assessing attitudes of the early sixth century would need an in-depth search of hagiographical writing. For the late sixth century, additional cross-reference to Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* is needed. It is the pope's writings, not the bishop's, that were inspirational for Jonas of Bobbio.

Another point of comparison that is lacking is the Church canons. Tellingly, books by Odette Pontal and Gregory Halfond are in the bibliography, but the edition of the Merovingian canons by Jean Gaudemet and Brigitte Basdevant is not (although the edition by Carlo de Clercq is present).[6] Yet Gregory's ideas need to be set against those expressed in the second Council of Mâcon (585) in particular. Jones talks about Gregory's views of the non-observance of holy days, but he seems oblivious to the canonical legislation relating to Sunday, and to the secondary literature on Sunday miracles. And on Gregory's account of the Council of Mâcon he needs to cite the crucial article by Stefan Esders and Helmut Reimitz.[7]

There are some other surprising gaps in the bibliography. Although Venantius Fortunatus is cited more often than any other contemporary of Gregory, there is no reference to the four-volume edition of his works published in the Belles Lettres series.[8] This is probably the most scholarly edition of the poet's works available, and Solange Quesnel's edition of the *Vita Martini* would have been particularly useful.[9] The absence of the Sources chrétiennes edition of Paulinus of Périgueux by Sylvie Labarre is more explicable, in that only the first volume has so far appeared, though that volume does have an extensive and helpful introduction.[10]

Jones concludes by stressing the need for more literary analysis of Gregory's works, but the gaps in his volume are very different. Gregory needs to be situated more firmly within the history of sixth-century theology and canon law. There is also a need to situate him more within the world that has been revealed by archaeology. Following Van Dam, Jones translates the word *vicus*, as applied to Brioude, as "village," but this scarcely seems appropriate now that we have some archaeological reports of the site.[11] In general there is little sense of geography: To present Gregory as traipsing "safely over southern Gaul" (p. 33) does not inspire confidence: Chalon, Lyon, and Clermont are scarcely in the South.

There are also some slips in the historical narrative: Jones places the Frankish takeover of Langres in 534 (p. 26), but if we are to believe Gregory's narrative of the escape of Attalus (*Histories* III, 15), it has to predate the death of Theuderic in 533. In other words, the Frankish conquest of north Burgundy antedated the final defeat of Godomar by some while. The letter of Gregory the Great transcribed in *Histories* X, 1 cannot be 589 (p. 113), since the author only became pope in 590.

Essentially, what Jones has provided is a fine in-depth reading of Gregory. And there is plenty of useful detail tucked away (not least in an extensive footnote on pp. 195-200, which is printed in such small font that it is almost illegible), but he looks beyond the confines of the text too

rarely. This would, however, be a good point of departure for anyone interested in the bishop of Tours, although Gregory's own works are even better.

NOTES

[1] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[2] A.C. Murray, "The Composition of the History of Gregory of Tours and its bearing on the political narrative," in A.C. Murray, ed., *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[3] Martin Heinzmann, *Gregory of Tours* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[4] Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[5] Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] Odette Pontal, *Histoire des conciles mérovingiens* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989); Gregory Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils AD 511-768* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Jean Gaudemet & Brigitte Basdevant, eds., *Les conciles des canons mérovingiens*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989).

[7] Stefan Esders and Helmut Reimitz, "After Gundovald, before Pseudo-Isidore: Episcopal Jurisdiction, Clerical Privilege and the Uses of Roman Law in the Frankish Kingdoms," *Early Medieval Europe* 27 (2019): 85-111.

[8] Venance Fortunat, *Poèmes I-III*, ed. M. Reydellet (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2002-2004); Venance Fortunat, *Œuvres, La vie de saint Martin*, ed., Solange Quesnel (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2002).

[9] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Martini*, ed. Solange Quesnel (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1996).

[10] Paulinus of Périgueux, *Vie de Saint Martin: prologue, livres I-III*, ed. Sylvie Labarre (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2016).

[11] A. Dubreucq and C. Lauranson-Rozas, eds., *Saint Julien et les origines de Brioude: actes du 1er colloque de Brioude, 22-25 septembre 2004* (Brioude: Almanach de Brioude, 2007).

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