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APOCALYPSE NOW? THE AMBIGUOUS ESCHATOLOGY OF GREGORY OF TOURS

*Gregory of Tours has, over the past few decades, become one of the most extensively studied authors of the Late Antiquity. Notwithstanding the progress achieved in the study of his historiographical work, his attitude towards eschatology has not yet been adequately addressed. Gregory refutes the arguments of his contemporaries who believe that the world is coming to an end, though he himself appears to question his own anti-apocalyptic attitude by registering the signs he understands as foretelling the coming apocalypse. Those apparently contradictory notions can be reconciled by the study of the way his *Historiae* are structured. Gregory, writing at the end of the sixth century, begins his narrative with the creation of the world and the fall of Adam and Eve. However, his work lacks any ending that is comparable with the divine act of creation it begins with. He settles this issue in a later part of his work by stressing the signs of the apocalypse that he is perfectly aware will not come soon. Thus, somehow artificially, he gives his narrative the Creation–Apocalypse frame which the contemporary Frankish history he describes could not provide him with.*

Key words: Gregory of Tours, historiography, eschatology, apocalypticism, late antiquity, early middle ages

End-of-the-world anxieties and hopes have been a frequently reoccurring theme in popular culture for the past few decades. The great commercial success of the *Left behind* book and movie series, Gow (2008: 9–12) bears witness to this. These circumstances encourage scrutiny of the eschatological component of the world of late antique Christian thought. The present article shall examine how Gregory of Tours wrestled with the idea of the apocalypse.

Various attempts have been made to answer the question about the meaning of eschatology presented in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours.¹ This

¹ Gregory of Tours (539–594) was born into an ancient senatorial Gallo-Roman family

plurality is due to the work of the Tournian bishop which contains passages that aim to both discourage the reader from speculating about the date of the end of the world and also to indicate that Gregory himself believed the end was near. Did he contradict himself? Did he change his mind?² The aim of the first part of this article is to summarize the interpretations of this ambiguous eschatology proposed in contemporary research. In the following section I will express the view that Gregory was by no means haunted by the vision of the nearing apocalypse.³ In the third part of this paper the function of Gregory's anti-apocalyptic passages within the structure of the *Histories* will be explained.

I use the terms *apocalypse*, *the end of the world* and *eschatology* as denoting the final phase of history as Christianity, especially the late antique Christianity, and Gregory himself saw it.⁴ I use those terms interchangeably while applying a very distinct meaning to the phrase *the beginnings of birth pangs*, the precise sense of which shall be discussed later.

It has been more than thirty years since de Nie (1979: 259–289) approached the problem of the apocalypse in the historiographical work of the Gallic bishop. She expanded on that theme in her much discussed book about Gregory (1987: 27–69). Her reasoning is as follows: when Gregory started writing his *Histories* he was strongly opposed to the opinion that the apocalypse was approaching and did his best to persuade his readers that there was no need to worry about the end of the world. But the never-ending wars waged by Merovingian kings against members of their family as well as the many signs and omens he himself observed and the fact that numerous false prophets appeared in Gaul convinced him that the miseries of his era were the foretelling that the end of the world was near.

as Georgius Florentius. He was brought up in the spirit of piety and respect towards the Gallic saints. He received a solid education in the Bible and Christian literature which he studied at the expense of classical authors. He was appointed the bishop of Tours in 573 and used the name Gregory from then on, de Nie (1987: 3–8). Apart from *Historiae*, his main work, he authored many hagiographical writings. The most comprehensive biography of this late antique bishop, politician and writer is Pietri (1983: 246–334). For the text of *Historiae* (the English version of the title, *the Histories* is used throughout the article) I am using the 1951 MGH edition by Krusch.

² Due to the fact that what can be known about Gregory is to be inferred almost exclusively from his own writings, I do not make a distinction between the real historical person Gregory and his literary *persona*.

³ The second section is partly based on an article of mine published in 2013.

⁴ For the question of eschatology and – especially – Christian eschatology, see Filoramo (1990: 847–852); Schnackenburg (1959: 1088–1093); Klein (1982: 270–299); May (1982: 299–305); Conzelmann (1958: 665–672); Kraft (1958: 672–680); Thraede (1966: 559–564).

Another view has been expressed by Landes (1988: 166–167) who argues that Gregory, far from embracing the view that the world was heading towards its end, did his best to discourage his flock from adopting it. Heinzelmann in his otherwise excellent book leaves the question of the ambiguity of Gregory’s eschatology unanswered (2001: 76–87). Finally, Breukelaar (1994: 299–305), not unlike de Nie, sees that Gregory’s eschatology evolved, with Gregory at first convinced of the imminent end of the world, only to adopt a radically anti-apocalyptic position in his later years.

Blair (2013: 110) contends that the notion of either promoting apocalypticism or suppressing it was foreign to Gregory, who employed apocalyptic imaginary at the service of the moral improvement of the Christian society in Gaul. There are, however, good grounds for establishing Gregory’s anti-apocalyptic tendencies.

De Nie (1987: 39,67) and Breukelaar (1994: 304–305) see that the writings and eschatology of Gregory are subjected to revision and evolution. It is telling that the directions of the evolution advocated by them are opposite. Bearing in mind that the “evolutionary” approach has led so far to opposite conclusions and that the author had ample time to revise *the Histories*,⁵ I will, rather than trying to discern particular phases of Gregory’s rewriting of his text⁶ and the change of his beliefs that, as it is suggested, stood behind it, try to treat it as a work showing a fundamental unity of thought. And the nature of that thought, I contend, is very anti-apocalyptic.⁷

That Gregory indeed saw his work as not only finished but, in a sense, sealed is clear from his plea to those who would succeed him in office, the future Touronian bishops. This is because Gregory threatens them with a vision of eternal torment should they dare to modify his writings (X 31).⁸

⁵ Both Goffart (1988: 134) and Heinzelmann (2001: 114–115) agree that, aside from establishing that books I–IV of *the Histories* were written probably around 575, very little can be said about the chronology of their writing and that the work should be treated as homogenous. Heinzelmann’s dating of the final revision of the work – 594, the last year of Gregory’s life – supports the idea that the Histories should be read as a uniform work of literature. The actual process of writing took almost 20 years. During that time Gregory would have had enough time to revise every piece of his work he deemed unsatisfactory.

⁶ Halsall’s (2007: 312) argumentation in support of the view that the supposedly apocalyptic preface to book V was the earliest written part of *the Histories* provides another argument against drawing conclusions from the chronology of their writing.

⁷ Regrettably, I had no chance of consulting *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2014) by J. Palmer when I was working on the present article.

⁸ “*Quos libros licet stilo rusticiori conscripserim, tamen coniuro omnes sacerdotes Domini, qui post me humilem ecclesiam Turonicam sunt recturi, per adventum domini nostri Iesu Christi ac terribilem reis omnibus iudicii diem, sic numquam confusi de*

The work of a man who so fiercely argues to preserve its integrity should be, beyond any doubt, seen as finished. And if treated as a finished work left by the author in the very shape he wanted it to be read in, the *Histories* can only be seen as downplaying the apocalypse. This claim is supported by several arguments.

Gregory provides his readers with the number of years that have passed since the creation of the world on several occasions, Breukelaar (1994: 300). He leaves no doubts as to the reason behind this practice: “*Illud etiam placuit propter eos, qui adpropinquantem finem mundi disperant, ut, collectam per chronicas vel historias anteriorum annorum summam, explanitur aperte, quanti ab exordio mundi sint anni.*” (I Praef).⁹ The ancient Church, as it is known, did not use the Anno Domini dating system until it became popular in the eighth century. Instead, the Anno Mundi scheme prevailed in the early centuries of Christianity. In this system, the year 1 was the year of Creation and, as it had been initially assumed, the incarnation of Christ took place in the year 5500 AM. Deeply rooted in this system was the conviction that Christ’s second coming would take place in the year 6000 AM, i.e. in the year 500 AD. Eusebius of Caesarea, writing in the early fourth century, was insightful enough to choose an earlier date for Jesus: according to him, he began his public ministry 5228 years after the creation; thus the early fourth century in which he lived would be c.5500 AM. In so doing, he modified the supposed date of the second coming: it was no longer the year 500 AD., but rather the year 800 AD.¹⁰ It is in this context that Gregory’s concern with calculating the years that had passed since the creation is to be understood. He makes his reader conscious of the age of the world on a few

ipso iudicio discedentes cum diabolo condempnemini, ut numquam libros hos aboleri faciatis aut rescribi, quasi quaedam eligentes et quaedam praetermittentes, sed ita omnia vobiscum integra inlibataque permaneant, sicut a nobis relicta sunt.”

⁹ De Nie (1979: 280–281) points out the ambiguity of the phrase “*qui adpropinquantem finem mundi disperant*” which “*can mean either despairing because the world is nearing its end (accusative or ablative absolute) or despairing of the world’s ending soon (accusative with infinitive: in the one case its imminent end, in the other its not yet ending induces despair.*” If one assumes that the latter was the case, it can hardly explain why Gregory would insert the number of years that had passed since the Creation, a number indicating that the world was not going to end soon. Blair (2013: 105) contends that Gregory does not explicitly state that he is introducing the number of years since the Creation to suppress apocalyptic anxiety because it was not his aim to do so. The very statement about the people who gave him a reason to evoke on a few occasions the summation of the years (“*Illud etiam placuit propter eos, qui adpropinquantem finem mundi disperant*”) demonstrates sufficiently his intention to comfort them.

¹⁰ For the Anno Mundi and Anno Domini schemes, see Landes (1988: 137–210).

occasions,¹¹ he also closes the *Histories* by emphasizing it once more,¹² so that the reader cannot be oblivious of its comforting significance. For the good news it announces is that even if the apocalypse is to occur about the year 800, there are still more than 200 years left: a number that must have made a much stronger impression on the late antique reader than it does on a modern reader, given that the life expectancy in this period was much shorter than it is today, Brown (1988: 6). The message of Gregory's calculations is simple and optimistic: there is no need to fear, the coming several generations will not witness the end of the world.

The bishop of Tours, however, wants to discredit eschatological speculations altogether and denies the very possibility of establishing the date of Christ's second coming, Landes (1988: 166–167): “*Sed diem illam omnibus hominibus oculi ipse Dominus manifestat, dicens: De die autem illa et ora nemo scit, neque angeli caelorum neque filius, nisi Pater solos*” (I Praef). Thus, the people indulging in such speculations are, in Gregory's opinion, ignoring the words of Christ himself.

If Gregory is a fierce opponent of apocalypticism, how should we, therefore, understand those passages of his work that seem to prove the opposite? Those most important are V Praef.¹³ and X 25.¹⁴ The former is an emotional plea for peace addressed to the Merovingian rulers, the latter describes the story of a false Christ, i.e. a local man, who claimed to be the Saviour himself. What connects these chapters is the notion that the phase of human history described by Jesus' words written in the Gospels as *the beginnings of birth pangs* (*initia dolorum* in Latin) has already begun. This phrase appears in the Gospels as a part of Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21). The question that arises from Gregory's use of that phrase is whether the fact that *the beginnings of birth pangs* have already begun means for him that the world will soon be facing its demise. This is the conclusion proposed by de Nie (1987: 67–68), but she could only arrive at it by applying her view of the chronology of Gregory's writing process (and we should bear in mind that such arguments are of a highly speculative nature and can be easily countered by those who presuppose a different

11 “*Explicit liber primus, continens annos 5596, qui conpotantur a principio usque ad transitum sancti Martini episcopi (I 44); Quod sunt simul anni 5774 tantum*” (IV 51).

12 “*Quorum omnis summa est anni VDCCXCII.*” (X 31).

13 “*Taedid me bellorum civilium diversitatis, que Francorum gentem et regnum valde proterunt, memorare; in quo, quod peius est, tempore illud quod Dominus de dolorum praedixit initium iam videmus: Consurgit pater in filium, filius in patrem, frater in fratrem, proximus in propinquum.*”

14 See below.

chronology) and at the cost of undermining the unity of thought present in *the Histories*.

It should be noted that the phase of history that the synoptic Gospels call *the beginnings of birth pangs* should not be immediately followed by the second coming of Christ. Those are *the beginnings* and not *the end*. There is no reason to evoke the whole rich patristic exegetical tradition concerning those chapters, neither is there possibility to do so in this article. Suffice it to say that the Church Fathers who Gregory may have known about (as for the patristic works he does not cite, we can only guess what he read; although it is beyond any doubt that he was well versed in Christian letters), or who, if that was not the case, at least expressed the understanding of the Scripture that was common currency in the Latin West, offered commentaries that could be easily used to disarm the apocalyptic potential of the Olivet Discourse. Hilary of Poitiers, a Gallic author like Gregory himself, saw in *the birth pangs* not the clear sign announcing the imminence of the end, but the prelude to the woes Jerusalem and the whole Jewish nation was to suffer (*Commentarius in Matthaëum* XXV). Jerome's commentary supports this reading, moreover, he points out that the presence of false prophets and ominous signs will shape the "ordinary", i.e. non eschatological, history of the Church until Christ returns (*Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaëi libri quattuor* 193–201)

There are, however, other supposed markers of the apocalyptic present in Gregory's writing. Signs, which, as de Nie (1987: 55–56) has suggested, constitute for Gregory evidence of the rapidly nearing end, were – in all their exceptionality – quite a normal part of late antique and medieval human experience, Hunger (1978: 263).¹⁵ They announced certain events (like the death of a ruler),¹⁶ but not necessarily *the end*. Since Gregory puts stress upon the fact that in the course of history sin and sanctity coexist,¹⁷ it does not seem that he thought that signs indicated the moral decadence of the Frankish kingdoms (the opinion expressed by Blume 1970: 163), let alone the end of the world. Also, nowhere does Gregory make an explicit connection between those signs and the coming apocalypse they supposedly announced. And why would he? At the time he sat down to write his

¹⁵ De Nie (1979: 261) mentions there was an ancient pagan tradition of seeing such phenomena as foretelling future woes.

¹⁶ Blair (2013: 106) underlines the connection existing between omens reported by the author of the *Histories* and the moral dimension of the reality he describes: "Gregory saw these signs as moral precursors to certain events. As his history continues, and the 'End' does not come, these portents are linked rather to the bad deeds of kings [...]"

¹⁷ "Prosequentes ordinem temporum, mixte confusequae tam virtutes sanctorum quam strages gentium memoramus." (II Praef.)

historiographical work, the Christian experience with signs had been common knowledge passed on from one generation to the next. It is therefore difficult to believe that Gregory had seen such phenomena as a radical and apocalyptic novelty.

One additional argument against Gregory's apocalypticism is his belief that he, as a bishop of Tours, would have successors: "...*coniuro omnes sacerdotes Domini, qui post me humilem ecclesiam Turonicam sunt recurturi...*" (X 31). If Tours is still going to be placed under the sacred authority of a local bishop when he is dead, it is not likely that the end of the world is imminent.

The conclusion presents itself as follows: from Gregory's insistence on the integrity of his work as well as from the fact that he had enough time to rewrite, rearrange and supplement it should be inferred that he saw the *Histories* as a coherent and finished text. This text offers a non-apocalyptic view of the future. Gregory is conscious that he lives in the period of time the Gospels call *initia dolorum*. In this time however, the Church – *Ecclesia militans* – finds itself in its normal state of dramatic but ordinary struggle for salvation until Christ's second coming, which is, according to Gregory, not imminent.

Although Gregory's apocalyptic passages are far from rendering his belief that the world is approaching its end, they play a significant role in the structure of *the Histories*. The second part of this paper will be devoted to the investigation of that role. I will try to demonstrate that the notions of apocalypse constitute the counterpart to Gregory's *archeology*, i.e. the story of creation, Old Testament and early Christian period that he describes in book I. The pendant to creation, i.e. the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment could not have been narrated by Gregory for they, of course, had not happened by the time he was finishing his work. Instead of narrating the Last Things, he chose to suggest them.

It has been pointed out that the Ciceronian rhetoric (or, for that matter, the art of structuring a literary work) persisted after the fall of the Western Empire: we find it for example in Isidore, see Breukelaar (1994: 92). We do not (and perhaps never will) know, to what extent the theory of rhetoric was known to Gregory. What we do know, however, is that he knew it from practice; for he was a skilled writer who read works of other skilled writers, Kaltenstadler (2011: 17).¹⁸ One of the secular writers Gregory read and, as it can be inferred from the use he makes of his text, appreciated, was Sallust

¹⁸ It seems that the persistent cliché of a naïve Gregory, who describes events as he sees them and who is unable to give his work coherent structure and mirrors the political and social chaos that surrounds him, has been ultimately abandoned over the past few decades, Goffart (1988: 112–119).

(IV 13).¹⁹ Sallust's history of Catalina's rise and fall begins with a preface, followed by a brief outline of the early history of Rome and its moral decadence which prepares the stage for the appearance of the villainous Catilina. (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 1–13). His nefarious activity is made possible due to the corruption that had invaded Roman public life long before he was born. The first book of Gregory's *Histories* contains similar *archeology*: his summary of the story of creation, the biblical narrative and the history of the first few centuries of Christianity. On the other hand, it was more than easy for Sallust to find a natural ending to his story: the final battle and the death of its eponymous hero (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 57–61). Gregory's narration, though, obviously lacked such an ending. Should it have had one? After all, [H]istoria est narratio rei gestae, per quam ea, quae in praeterito facta sunt, dinoscuntur. (Isidore, *Etymologiae* I XLI). *Res gestae* was not the only subject he writes about: the *Histories* do not only commemorate the past: they announce the future. Gregory stresses it at the very beginning in his creed: the future is to witness the second coming and the Last Judgment.²⁰ On the other hand, this eschatological future is shaped by the present: the saints will be rewarded and the impious punished according to their deeds. Gregory deals with the *res gerendae* as well as with the past.

And because the ending that would pass into the Christian framework of history is not at his disposal simply because it is the question of the eschatological future that is far from his present, Gregory chooses to signalize what he cannot describe. The device he uses in order to accomplish this goal is typology.

Typology is the instrument of biblical exegesis Christian authors employed to demonstrate how persons and events described in the Old Testament had foretold those of the New Testament. This particular scheme of thought appears in the New Testament itself and was subsequently developed by post-

¹⁹ “*Sed nos haec narrantis, Sallustii sententiam, quam in detractaturibus historiograforum 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.*” Gregory felt that the circumstances in which he was writing resembled the reality Sallust had to deal with.

²⁰ “*De fine vero mundi ea sentio quae a prioribus didici, Antechristum prius esse venturo. Antechristus vero primum circumcisionem inducit, se asserens Christum, deinde in templo Hierusolimis statuam suam collocat adorandam, sicut Dominum dixisse legimus: Videbitis abhuminationem desolationes stantem in loco sancto. Sed diem illam omnibus hominibus oculi ipse Dominus manifestat, dicens: De die autem illa et ora nemo scit, neque angeli caelorum neque filius, nisi Pater solos.*” (I Praef). Apocalypse is therefore to be understood as a series of events that will take place in the final phase of history, the necessary condition of its beginning being the appearance of the Antichrist, who will place his statue at the Jerusalem Temple.

biblical Church writers, finally becoming one of the predominant medieval schemes of thought. Actions described in the Old Testament are referred to as types or figures, while their New Testament fulfillments are called antitypes or *materia*, Thürlemann (1974: 85–94). One example taken from Gregory’s work shall illustrate this scheme in a sufficient manner:

“[...] *Dominus [...] hominem ad suam imaginem similitudinemque plasmavit [...]. Cuius dormienti ablata costa, mulier Ewa creata est. Nec dubium enim est, quod hic primus homo Adam, antequam peccaret, tipum Redemptoris domini praetulisset. Ipsi enim in passionis sopore obdormiens, de latere suo dum aquam cruoremque producit, virginem immaculatamque ecclesiam sibi exhibuit, redemptam sanguine, latice emundatam, non habentem maculam aut rugam, id est limphis ablutam propter maculam, extensam in crucem propter rugam.*” (I 1)

The analogy is twofold: on the one hand, Adam’s falling asleep foretells Christ’s “falling asleep”, i.e. his passion;²¹ on the other hand, it stresses the act of *producing* woman from a sleeping’s man body. The first Adam is a shadow of the second Adam – Christ; his bodily wife prefigures the spiritual bride of Christ, the Church.

The constituted parts of the typological scheme need not to be taken from the Bible. Gregory exhibits a strong inclination towards including historical (in the sense of postbiblical) personages into this scheme: Clovis receiving baptism fulfills the type of Constantine the Great (II 31²²), King Chilperic is called *Nero nostri temporis et Herodis* (VI 46). However, there is yet another kind of typology that Gregory uses which casts new light on his apocalyptic moments: futurist typology. Here, a person or an event from the present is taken to prefigure the last things, e.g. the coming of Antichrist. This is the case of the false prophet described in IX 6:

“*Fuit eo anno in urbe Thoronica Desiderius nomine, qui se magnum quendam esse dicebat, adserens se multa posse facere signa. Nam et nuntius inter se atque Petrum Paulumque apostolos discurrere iactitabat. [...] Tantoque miser elatus erat, ut iuniorem sibi beatum Martinum esse diceret, se vero apostolis coaequaret. Nec mirum, si hic similem se dicat apostolis, cum ille auctor nequitiae, a quo ista procedunt, Christum se esse in fine saeculi fateatur.*”

Gregory knows well that this man was not *the* Antichrist who will appear only in the final stage of history and only after certain prerequisites have

21 This metaphor of passions (and even the very word *sopor* that Gregory employs here) goes back to Psalm 3, which reads: “*ego dormivi et soporatus sum exsurrexi quia Dominus suscipiet me*”.

22 “*Procedit novos Constantinus ad lavacrum, deleturus leprae veteris morbum sordentesque maculas gestas antiquitus recenti latice deleturus.*”

been met (such as reestablishing the Jerusalem Temple)²³. Instead, he is the prefiguration of the Man of Sin, announcing his future appearance by his actions while not being identical with him.

Another similar place is X 25:

“At in Galliis Masiliensim provinciam morbus saepe nominatus invasit. Andecavos, Namneticos atque Cenomanicos valida famis oppressit. Initia sunt enim haec dolorum iuxta illud quod Dominus ait in euangelio: Erunt pestilentiae et fames et terrae motus per loca; et exurgent pseudochristi et pseudoprophetae et dabunt signa et prodigia in caelo, ita ut electos in errore mittant, sicut praesenti gestum est tempore. Quidam enim ex Biturigo [...] proferens se magnum ac profiteri se non metuens Christum, adsumptam secum mulierem quendam pro sorore, quam Maria vocitari fecit.”

As I have shown earlier, such appearances of false prophets connected with catastrophic events are something the *Ecclesia militans* will have to face until the Devil and those deceived by him are finally conquered and punished by Christ. In the context of Gregory’s strong anti-apocalypticism, passages like IX 6 and X 25 stress, on the one hand, that the normal life of the Church also includes such dramatic elements. However, they do much more than that. In a subtle way they point to the finale of human history. The argument that Gregory has with a cleric who doubts the resurrection of the dead (X 13) also suggests the ultimate object of Christian hope.

Judgment Day, as Gregory suggests in his plea to his successors with which he closes his book, will finally come (X 31). But it will not come right now, as the reader is made sure by the calculations attached to the last chapter of the final book.²⁴

That so many passages related to eschatology are to be found in the last two books of *Histories* can hardly be taken to be accidental. Book I deals with the beginning of the world and the distant past while the subsequent parts of the work more or less describe contemporary history. And because the end will not come soon, it is being juxtaposed with sixth century Merovingian Gaul. Thus, it is more than justified to see the *Histories* as mirroring in their internal structure the Christian scheme of history. In this scheme, Book I corresponds to the story of Creation, Books II–VIII constitute the equivalent to the redemption (the baptism of Clovis is redemptive in as much as it makes it possible for him and his people to partake in the

²³ “Antechristus vero primum circumcisionem inducit, se asserens Christum, deinde in templo Hierusolimis statuam suam collocat adorandam [...]” (I Praef) Gregory gives no hint, as he does writing about other things elsewhere in the Prologue, that the rebuilding of the Temple is to be taken figuratively. And no signs of the imminence of this rebuilding could have been discerned in the time of Gregory.

²⁴ “Quorum omnis summa est anni VDCCXCII.” (X 31)

fruit of Christ's cross) and Church history until the Second Coming, while the Last Judgment, heaven and hell, although being signalized in the earlier books, are manifestly present in Books IX and X.

The author of the *Histories* was by no means scarred by the coming apocalypse. He was, however, a skilled writer who was able to encapsulate the Christian scheme of universal history within the local history of late antique Gaul. Gregory's writings, once dismissed as a barbarian product of the barbarian age, will certainly continue to astonish their readers.

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