Lauren Baker

EAT MY DUST:

INGESTING THE SACRED IN THE WORKS OF GREGORY OF TOURS

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University Private University

Vienna

May 2024

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(United States of America)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, Lauren Baker, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

Although there is an enormous amount of scholarship on Gregory of Tours and his writings, little has been done on the materiality of his miracle accounts. His recurring remedy of ingesting holy dust is quite unique in the sixth century, found only in Gaul and Syria, and is all the more perplexing due to its indigestible nature. Nevertheless, ingesting dust makes up 32% of all cures involving healing substances in Gregory's work. Unraveling the origin of this miracle requires a background of Gregory's life in order to assess his motivations; an exploration into external influences such as fourth and fifth century Christian writers and connections to Syria; and a survey of the different ways in which healing could be achieved in sixth century Gaul. Further, data gathered from Gregory's writings will help correlate holy substances with their associated afflictions, beneficiaries, applications, and locations. This data will support the analysis of the social contexts of miraculous healing, and evaluate their growing spiritual and physical significance between the fourth and sixth centuries.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wonderful parents, my strange brothers, and my dear friends JJ, Brandon, and Ada: I love you all very much. I would also like to recognize the incredible support from both the Shining Stars Team and the Kohanim Association of CEU, both of whom have encouraged me to strive for greatness. I consider myself lucky to be in the company of such incredible scholars in my graduating class, all who have demonstrated their quick intellect and admirable character over the last two years: thank you for making this experience the best it could have possibly been. I am grateful for the support of my previous advisor Ned Schoolman at UNR, without whom I never would have attended CEU. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my advisors Gerhard Jaritz and Éloïse Adde for their patience and guidance. Thank you.

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[1] Martin Heinzelmann, "Gregory of Tours: Elements of a Biography," in A Companion to Gregory of Tours. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, Volume 63. ed. Murray, Alexander C.. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016): 11.
[2] Robert H. Labberton, *New Historical Atlas and General History* (New York, NY: Townsend MacCoun, 1886), Plate XXIII, found at https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/6800/6839/6839.htm

List of Abbreviations

VSM: *Virtutes Sancti Martini* (Gregorius Turonensis) [Miracles of Bishop Martin]

VSJ: *Virtutes Sancti Juliani* [Miracles of Martyr Julian]

GC: *In gloria confessorum* [Glory of the Confessors]

GM: *In gloria martyrum* [Glory of the Martyrs]

VP: *Vita partum* [Life of the Fathers]

Historiae: *Historiarum libri decem* [History of the Franks]

Introduction

Before the mid-fourth century, Christian miracles were limited only to the living acts of Jesus, such as exorcisms, miracles of increased substances (such as oil or water), or miraculous healing. But in the fourth and fifth centuries when saints became a popular source of miracles, this realm was expanded into dreams, visions, resurrection, as well as the traditional exorcisms and healing cures.[3] At this stage, these miracles were all performed by living holy men or their contact relics (i.e., touching the saint's clothing could bring healing).[4] These accounts inspired Paulinus of Milan as he wrote his *Life of Ambrose*, who included similar miracles from the saint or his clothing. But he added something more as well: miracles of the relics of dead saints.

By the mid fifth century, relics could fit into three main categories: objects or substances that touched the saints during their lives; objects or substances whose miraculous abilities continued after their deaths; or pieces of the dead saints themselves. Eventually, two different miracle traditions formed in which Christians under eastern influences emphasized miracles of living saints, while those under western influences gave priority to dead saints and their relics. In the West, these relics became capable of miracles previously only performed by living saints, and grew to include even more (such as weather miracles, or the "odor of sanctity" at holy burial sites). By the sixth century these miracles, especially miracles of healing, would more often take place at the tombs of saints.

[3] Joan M Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background*, Studies and Texts 69. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 95. These hagiographers include Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) Jerome (d. 420), and Sulpicius Severus (d. 425), and Augustine of Hippo (d. 430).

[4] For example, Sulpitius [sic] Severus and Alexander Roberts, *The Life of Saint Martin of Tours*. In: *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, Volume 11 (New York, 1894), XVIII.

As noted by Peter Brown, the relationship between believer and saint had radically changed:

> They did not only come to bow, to pray, and to be prayed for. They came to touch—to rub themselves against the tombs, to take away their dust and their candle wax, and to drink the oil of their lamps. What they wanted was a participatory, one might almost say "symbiotic," relationship with the other world.[5]

Situating Gregory of Tours' recurring miracle of ingesting tomb dust within the broader development of the cult of relics is relatively straightforward, but does not provide an adequate explanation for the unique nature of this miracle. Healing substances were not uncommon by any means in previous hagiographies: holy water and oil had biblical roots, and as such were common in saints' lives. But only very rarely were these substances ingested, and only according to the affliction — such as muteness or exorcism. But these past examples were limited, and do not begin to approach ingested miracle substances to the degree that Gregory does. For him, ingestion seems to be the default means of applying holy healing to the "patient." In this thesis, I will clarify the different influences and circumstances in which this particular miracle became an iconic facet of Gregory's hagiographies. Further, I will explain how and why this practice took hold in Gaul while it remained otherwise nonexistent in the Christian West.

Gaps in the Research

While there is an overwhelming amount of scholarship on the life and work of Gregory, little has been done in the way of holy substances in his miracle accounts. The exception to this is Edward James in his article "Materiality and the Holy in Gregory of Tours," as well as his

[5] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Haskell Lectures on History of Religions, N.S., 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), XXVI.

ongoing project to build a database for these miracles. However, this database is not yet published, and the website included in the above article was last updated in 2013.[6] I am excited for the future developments of this research project as they come to fruition.

I was surprised to find such a lacuna in anything related to Gregory of Tours, as such an enormous amount of attention has been given to this figure and his valuable accounts. Accurately, he is credited as one of the most important and prolific writers of the Merovingian age who influenced hagiography for centuries to come, and whose work is especially valuable given the general scarcity of texts from the sixth century. As such, his life, miracles, dreams and visions, histories, and political involvement are all significant in the field of Late Antiquity.

Yet these small recurring elements in his hagiographies have been left mostly untouched, and therefore I have little with which to position my research in any discourse. I aim to fill this gap by delivering data and analysis based on careful studies of Gregory's life and motivations, what may have influenced his writings, and the state of the spiritual-medical sectors during his life. I also explore connections between eastern and western Christian locations that both feature dust miracles and the possible relationships between them. My main interventions are derived from a spreadsheet created to find connections between holy substances and their associated afflictions, beneficiaries, and applications. Overall, this thesis provides research towards further understanding the social contexts of hagiographic healing through miracles, and their spiritual and physical significance.

Literature Review

[6] Edward James, "Materiality and the Holy in Gregory of Tours." In *Omnium Magistra Virtutum*, eds. Andrew Cain and Gregory Hays, 15:319–28. Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2022). The site listed in this article is https://gregoryoftours.com .

My literature review consists of scholarship which provides background and historical context. Primary sources from Christian writers between the fourth and sixth centuries will be used as supplementary material, and secondary research on Gregory's upbringing and time as bishop are essential to understand his perspective. Incoming influences from outside the Gallic ecclesiastical world are also examined, such as secondary literature on holy men in Syria and alternative avenues of healing during the sixth century.

Primary Sources

For my primary sources I will use all of Gregory's hagiographies (*Glory of the Martyrs, Glory of the Confessors, Life of the Fathers, Life of Martin,* and *Life of Julian*)[7] and his *History of the Franks*.[8] I also use works from Christian fathers from the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries as supplementary and comparative material for the treatment of Martin, his miracles, and on a different topic, in regards to the use of some non-sanctioned items such as protective amulets or Christian forms of divination. These sources specifically include the three other *Vitae Martini,* each by Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus of Périgueux, and Venantius Fortunatus, [9] and additional sources such as the *Sermons* of Caesarius of Arles, the *Poems* of Paulinus of Nola, *Contra Vigilantium* by Jerome, and the *Life of Symeon Stylites*.[10] Furthermore, passages of the

[7] I am excluding Gregory's *Life of Andrew*, as it focuses on the miracles of Andrew during his life and concludes with his death. Therefore there are no post-mortem miracles of relics in this text.

[8] Gregory Bishop of Tours and Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Confessors*, Translated Texts for Historians 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988); Gregory Bishop of Tours and Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Martyrs*, Translated Texts for Historians 3 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988); Gregory Bishop of Tours and Edward James, *Life of the Fathers*, 2. ed., impr, Translated Texts for Historians 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007); Gregory Bishop of Tours and Giselle de Nie, *Lives and Miracles*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 39 (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2015); Gregory Bishop of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe, The Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth ; Baltimore [etc.]: Penguin, 1974).

[9] Sulpitius [sic] Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin of Tours*; Bryan Ellis Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary on Book Six of the Vita Sancti Martini by Paulinus of Périgueux," PhD diss. (Vienna: Universität Wien, 2015); Venantius Fortunatus and N. M. Kay. *Vita Sancti Martini*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 59. (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[10] Caesarius Bishop of Arles. *Sermons. 1: 1 - 80*. The Fathers of the Church 31. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1956); Paulin de Nole and Patrick Gerard Walsh, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*. Ancient Christian Writers 40. (New York, Ramsey, N.J: Newman press, 1975); Jerome of Stridon, *Contra Vigilantium.* trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893); Lent,

vitae of Augustine, Ambrose, Germanus, and Stephen will aid me in offering comparative material.

Secondary Sources

My secondary sources have laid the foundation upon which I will construct my argument. The topics needed to understand the background of Gregory's unusual miracles are abundant, but my general focus is on Gregory, his circumstances, and the wider Christian world with its changing relationship with relics during the fifth and sixth centuries.

For fundamental information on Gregory of Tours, I am particularly indebted to edited volumes such as *The World of Gregory of Tours* (eds. Mitchell, Kathleen, and I.N. Wood), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (ed. Murray, Alexander C.), and *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*. (eds. Bonnie Effros and Isabel Moreira), all of which are key points of reference for anyone seeking perspective on Gregory or the Merovingian period in general.[11] Martin Heinzelmann's work in *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* has also been essential, as well as *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom* by Jamie Kreiner.[12] In addition to the chapters and articles in the above texts, deep analyses on Gregory (both on his writing and the man himself) have been offered by Giselle de Nie which offer unique insights into Gregory's emotions and inner landscape.[13]

Frederick. "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum, Vol. IV." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915).

[11] Kathleen Mitchell and I. N. Wood, eds., *The World of Gregory of Tours*, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions, v. 8 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002); Bonnie Effros and Isabel Moreira, *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World* (New York (N.Y.): Oxford University Press, 2020); Alexander C. Murray, ed., *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, VOLUME 63 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2016).

[12] Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001); Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 96 (Cambridge (GB): Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[13] Giselle de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours*, Studies in Classical Antiquity 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987); Giselle De Nie, *Word, Image and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul*, (London: Routledge, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003418542.

In regards to the broader circumstances of relics, magic, and healing in the Late Antique world, any analysis in this area would be incomplete without the work of Peter Brown, Patrick Geary, and Robert Wiśniewski, all who have contributed extensively on the rise of relics during Late Antiquity.[14] On Christian medicine, magic, and various means of healing in the late antique world, Valerie J. Flint and Bernadette Filotas both tactfully address pre-Christian practices and how they may have evolved or been accommodated into a Christian world.[15] A deeply helpful text in understanding different spiritual healers in Gaul is the work of Allen E. Jones in *Death and Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours.*[16] I am especially grateful to Gary Vikan, one of the few scholars who has addressed the ingestion of spiritual substances in the Byzantine world.[17]

Methodology and Outline

This thesis approaches the topic of Gregory's healing tomb dust three separate ways. The first, discussed in Chapter 1, is to understand Gregory's circumstances and possible motivations for promoting these unusual miracles. This includes his early life, education, and upbringing, but also larger aspects of his world, such as evidence of "pagan" survivals in Gaul and their intersections with a new transforming Christianity. This chapter also addresses the evolution of the various lives of Martin and their inclusion of holy substances, and in addition, locates the first instance and use of miraculous tomb dust. Chapter two examines potential influences or external factors which may have had an impact on his hagiographical choices,

[14] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*; Geary, Patrick J. Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1990.; Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[15] Valerie J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature*, Studies and Texts 151 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005).
[16] Allen E. Jones, *Death and Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours: Religion and Society in Late Antique Gaul* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462988040.
[17] Gary Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 65–86, https://doi.org/10.2307/1291495; Gary Vikan, "Ruminations on Edible Icons: Originals and Copies in the Art of Byzantium," *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989): 47–59.

especially in regards to ingesting holy substances. This includes church fathers whose writings Gregory would have been familiar with, but also other hagiographies from the East — in particular, from Syria. To support this, the possibility of a Syrian population in Gaul will also be explore in order to give perspective on the likelihood of this potential influence. The third chapter situates Gregory's miracles in the medical world during this time, which besides the spiritual healing of saints, could be also accessed through physicians or soothsayers. This survey continues with the investigation of spiritual mechanisms which could bring health to the body, and how those mechanisms could be accessed.

Addressing these elements all work to form an answer to my original query, which crystallizes in the final analysis chapter of this thesis. My methodology in this chapter shifts to utilizing a spreadsheet which categorizes all healing substances in the hagiographies and histories of Gregory of Tours. This data was compiled in order to explore supplementary aspects of these healing accounts, such as the sex and gender of the beneficiaries, the associated afflictions with miracle substances, and the methods of application (ingested or applied externally). However, the more subtle information these miracles yield reveals the importance of the locations of tombs, drawing the focus away from Martin's basilica in Tours, and further back into Gregory's upbringing.

Chapter 1: Gregory's World

1. Life of Gregory

1.1 Early Life, Education, and Family

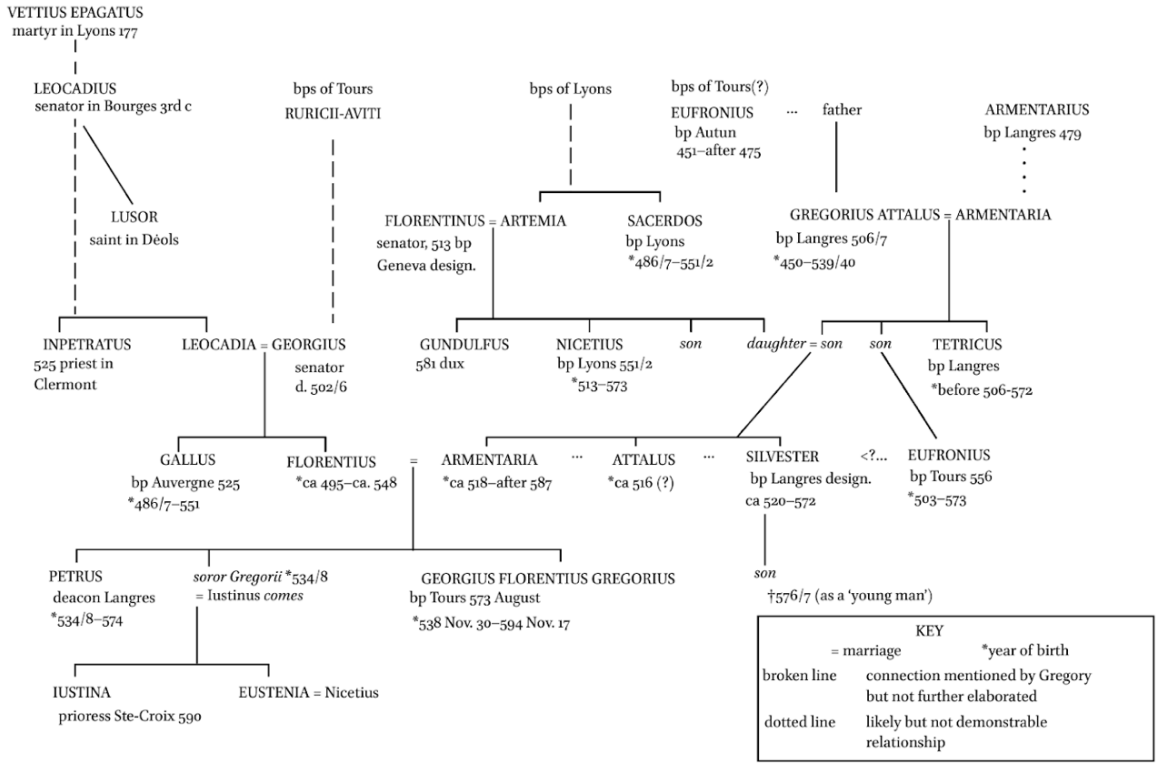


Fig. 1 Genealogy of Gregory of Tours, courtesy of Martin Heinzelmann.[18]

[18] Martin Heinzelmann, "Gregory of Tours: Elements of a Biography," in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, Volume 63. ed. Murray, Alexander C.. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016): 11.

Gregory of Tours was born on November 30th 538[19] into a powerful family of both ecclesiastical and senatorial importance in the Auvergne region of central Gaul.[20] At the time of his birth, Gaul was tense with recent political conflict due to divisions among royal sons vying for power and territory.[21] After Theuderic I (d. 534; son of Clovis) attacked and claimed Clermont and its surrounding region in the 520s,[22] the descendants of the old Roman senatorial aristocracies shifted their focus on attaining ecclesiastical positions in order to maintain civil authority and harness religious influence.[23] However, Gregory's family already had deep ecclesiastical power: Martin Heinzelmann's extensive work in creating a family tree of Gregory's relatives shows generations of Gallic senators and bishops predating the 520s, and even a martyr all the way back to the second century (see fig. 1).[24]

Although Gaul had only been officially made Christian under Clovis in the very early sixth century, the presence and significance of saints' cults indicate that it was already an important cultural element. Saint Martin's cult had been present since the early fifth century (emerging shortly after his death in 397), but other local saints had arisen as well; Gregory's paternal side was aligned with their family saint Julian of Brioude (third century), while his mother's side was more closely associated with the popular Saint Martin. In fact, his maternal side had a long history of holding the episcopacy in Tours where Saint Martin's church was

[19] Heinzelmann provides the specific date; other scholars (i.e. Van Dam) are less specific and estimate somewhere near the 540s. See: Martin Heinzelmann, "Gregory of Tours: Elements of a Biography," 20.
[20] Gregory Bishop of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe. The Penguin Classics. (Harmondsworth; Baltimore et al: Penguin, 1974), henceforth referred to as *Historiae* 4.15; Gregory Bishop of Tours and Edward James, *Life of the Fathers*. 2. ed., Translated Texts for Historians 1. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), henceforth referred to as *VP*, 7.1.
[21] Valerie J. Flint, "The Early Medieval 'Medicus', the Saint—and the Enchanter," *Social History of Medicine* 2, no. 2 (1989), 129.
[22] Edward James, "A Sense of Wonder: Gregory of Tours, Medicine, and Science," in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L.T. Bethel*l. eds. Bethell, Denis L. T., and Marc Anthony Meyer. (London ; Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1993), 47.
[23] Tamar Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth Century Gaul: Rethinking Gregory of Tours*. Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 90.
[24] Heinzelmann, "Elements of a Biography," 11 (Fig. 1).

located — according to Gregory's Histories, all but five bishops of Tours were blood relatives.[25] As such, his parents' marriage was something of a "dynastic merger" between two important families and their saints in central-eastern Gaul.[26]

Gregory was primed from a young age to be involved in the church. After his father Florentius died when Gregory was only ten, his education and mentorship passed on to his paternal uncle Gallus Bishop of Clermont, and later taken up by Avitus (the archdeacon and future bishop of the same diocese), both of whom emphasized ecclesiastical writings in young Gregory's studies.[27] After overcoming a serious illness at the age of thirteen, Gregory chose to become a cleric, indicating that even as a young man he held a strong faith in spiritual healing which would continue through his life.[28] By adolescence, he had been given ecclesiastical responsibilities in important masses and, at least once, the task of keeping the keys to an oratory in Marsat for Saint Mary's feast.[29] At age twenty-five in 563, Gregory finally confirmed his relationship with Saint Martin and continued his studies in Clermont as a deacon.

Gregory's family felt a deep responsibility for his spiritual education regarding the importance of saints and their miracles.[30] Deep and genuine belief filled his world on all sides, especially his immediate household. For instance, although highly unusual, his father had a private relic collection which included a protective amulet containing ashes of an unknown saint, which Gregory would later place in an oratory he built himself in Tours.[31] His mother

[25] *Historiae*, 5.49.
[26] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 55.
[27] *VP* prologue of book 2; Jones, *Death and Afterlife,* 67.
[28] *VP,* 2.2.
[29] For instance, he assisted his mother at a mass for Saint Polycarp at Riom, and held the keys to the oratory needed for the feast of Saint Mary in Marsat. See Gregory Bishop of Tours and Raymond Van Dam, *Glory of the Martyrs*. Translated Texts for Historians 3. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988) henceforth referred to as *GM*, 85, 89.
[30] Gregory Bishop of Tours and Giselle de Nie. *Lives and Miracles*. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 39. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2015), henceforth referred to as *VSM* 2.1; 3.
[31] Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 53. Florentius wore this as protection against natural disasters, bandits, and other threats. Gregory later would attribute his protection from natural disasters to the medallion (*GM,* 83);

Armentaria was known for her piety, but also her openness to what might be referred to as "esoteric" spirituality. This is evident in a story from Gregory's early childhood, wherein he twice had dream-visions with instructions for how to heal his father's gout (one using an inscribed wooden block placed under his pillow, the other using burned fish heart and liver).[32] While most mothers would probably dismiss these dreams as a child's anxieties, Armentaria had Gregory's dream-instructions carried out immediately (both times with positive outcomes). She also supported her brother Tetricus' practice of *sortes biblicae* (book divination), a semi-mystical practice of reading randomly selected passages from the Bible as a way of seeking God's instructions.[33]

In addition to the influence of his parents, Gregory witnessed the reality of the saints' powers during exorcisms using his grandfather's stick (also named Gregory) Bishop of Langres, and would later describe his close relatives (his uncle Gallus and great uncle Nicetius) as saints.[34] All of these figures and their practices informed Gregory's worldview and his connections with the saints and their relics, including their miracles of healing. As a result, it would seem that Gregory's relationship with the saints and his faith in their protection and healing miracles was genuine and sincere.[35]

In 573, at the age of thirty-five, Gregory joined in his family's ecclesiastical tradition and was consecrated as thirteenth bishop of Tours by King Sigibert of Austrasia. Raymond Van Dam presents Gregory's life between becoming deacon and bishop as something dramatic and

Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 20.; Indeed, it was quite unusual for any family to have a private relic collection at all: see Edina Bozóky, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint-Louis: protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir*. Bibliothèque historique et littéraire. (Paris: Beauchesne), 2007.

[32] *GC*, 39.

[33] *Historiae*, 4.16. This type of divination was also performed by Merovech (father of Childeric I) to disprove a soothsayer. See *Historiae* 5.14.

[34] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 72.; "Even in the holy man's absence men used the stock [sic: a mistranslation corrected to "stick," provided by John Kitchen] which he used to carry in his hand and expelled demons by raising it and making the sign of the cross." *VP,* 7.2.

[35] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 49.

unstable, and who repeatedly stresses how unlikely it was that Gregory became bishop of Tours at all.[36] However, other scholars such as Heinzelmann see his upward movement as predictable, given his maternal family's history in Tours. There is also the possibility that Gregory was chosen by King Sigibert due to his uncle Gallus' previous loyalty, as well as the advantage Tours offered as an "an illustrious metropolitan see" bordering three kingdoms (Austrasia, Neustria, and Burgundy) — a valuable asset for a leader looking to ensure political control.[37] Unfortunately, Tours faced a civil war at the beginning of Gregory's episcopacy leaving in its wake a dissolution of order: "oaths were broken, churchmen, even of renowned sanctity, were ignored, [and] churches were violated… ."[38] In this context, Gregory took on the responsibility of ordering and preserving his new diocese in addition to managing a powerful see. To do this he would need support from above and below: the former is evidenced in his political involvement as presented in his histories, in which he interacts personally with kings and other influential bishops and figures of high importance.[39] The latter is demonstrated in his outreach into the pastoral areas surrounding Gaul where rural peasants may have engaged in lingering pre-Christian practices which he condemned, at least in words, as "pagan."[40]

1.2 "Pagan" Survivals in Gaul:

These pre-Christian traditions are an important facet of Gregory's (and Gaul's) religious landscape, but what is referred to as "paganism" in this context was not a monolith, and the only remaining sources are from Christian writers who likely benefited from presenting it as

[36] Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 67, 63.
[37] Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 63.
[38] Guy Halsall, "The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' Histories: Its Form, Context and Significance." *The English Historical Review* 122, no. 496 (2007), 310. Additionally, Halsall states that "The events of 574-6, and especially Sigibert's murder, were clearly those that prompted Gregory to begin his [historical] work." Halsall, "Preface to Book V," 311.
[39] John Kitchen, "Gregory of Tours, Hagiography, and the Cult of the Saints in the Sixth Century 375-424." ," in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, Volume 63. ed. Murray, Alexander C.. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016): 387.; *Historiae* 6.2, 6.5, 6.3; *VSM* 4.17.
[40] Heinzelmann, "Elements of a Biography," 24; for more on Gregory's political involvement, see 25-27.

such. Indeed, scholarship surrounding the existence and prevalence of "pagan survivals" in the Gallic countryside is far from settled:[41] Yitzhak Hen argues that whatever pre-Christian religion had remained in Gaul was scarce by the time of Gregory's writings, pointing out Gregory's descriptions of pagan shrines that had been abandoned.[42] However, William E. Klingshirn and Bernadette Filotas argue for something more nuanced, the former of whom asserts that Christianity and magical or divinatory practices were not mutually exclusive, and which both offered "strategies for accessing divine power and knowledge in a world of deep uncertainty and risk."[43] Filotas argues that these practices were cultural rather than religious — they were "in effect, the ethnic traditions and folklore of newly Christianised peoples," and "parts of the common heritage which bound all classes together," including the aristocracy.[44] Elements of this have already been made apparent in his father's amulet, his uncle's divination using gospels, and the implementation of Gregory's dream-instructions.

However, Gregory disparagingly referred to practitioners of these customs as *rusticii*, implying that these issues remained in the countryside populated by those ignorant of the saints' power. This was not so, even among the clergy. In his *Sermons*, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) railed against the use of amulets even if they contained "holy things and divine readings,"[45] but it was the monks and clerics themselves who both made and distributed them (partially in order to control the production and use).[46] Although this was unilaterally forbidden by Caesarius and Martin of Braga (d. 580), as well as the councils of Vannes (461-491),[47] Agde (506), and

[41] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals,* 19. On the term "pagan survivals" and alternatives, see this page and William E. Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination in the Merovingian World." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*, eds. Bonnie Effros and Isabel Moreira. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2020), 968.
[42] Yitzhak Hen, "Paganism and Superstitions in the Time of Gregory of Tours: Une Question Mal Posée!" in *The World of Gregory of Tours*. Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions, v. 8. eds. Mitchell, Kathleen Mitchell and I. N. Wood. (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002), 233.
[43] Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination," 968.
[44] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals,* 15, 27.
[45] Caesarius, *Sermons*, 50.1.
[46] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals,* 252.
[47] It is interesting to note that Canon 16 from the Council of Vannes, dated between 462 and 468, is from Perpetuus Bishop of Tours himself, showing that in the following century use among ecclesiastical authorities like Gregory himself may have become more lax. See Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination," 100.

Orleans (511), their prohibitions did little to stop their production or popularity.[48] Even other ecclesiastical authorities disregarded these mandates; besides Gregory of Tours, Saint Oyend (d. 510-514) and his monks were known for making effective phylacteries, and Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) himself sent an amulet to Lombard queen Theodelinda (d. 628).[49] There is also evidence of the Merovingian aristocracy using the *sortes sangallenses*, a divination practice under the greater umbrella of "saints' lots" similar to the book divination Gregory's uncle performed.[50] This particular process was useful for far more than the healing or agricultural protection needed in the countryside, and additionally offered divination for issues regarding "political office, business relations, legal troubles, bequests, captivity and freedom, exile, military action, and life expectancy, among others," indicating a strong presence of urban upper-class interest.[51] Evidently, the *rusticii* were not solely responsible for the pre-Christian survivals in sixth century Gaul.

A salient feature of all the above examples is that while the core practices themselves can be described as pre-Christian, they had been Christianized in terms of belief and spiritual mechanism of efficacy. This returns to the points of Filotas and Klingshirn and their arguments that these practices were cultural rather than religious, and were not incompatible with Christian theology. But the difference is that these were all in service of the true power of God through the saints or gospels — anything else was demonic in nature.

1.3 Analysis and Conclusion

Although there is much more to discuss regarding Gregory's life, the most notable features of his biography for the purposes of this thesis are his faith in holy healing (even from a young age), his Christianized worldview as informed by his family (including their use of

[48] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals,* 246; Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination," 113-114.
[49] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals,* 246.
[50] Klingshirn, "Magic and Divination," 974.
[51] Ibid.

protective medallions and divinatory practices), his long-term dedication to Saint Martin, and the social context in which he became bishop (including the popularity of esoteric Christian practices). But given his social and ecclesiastical position by this time, his inclusion and emphasis of holy dust miracles was quite peculiar, and as will be explored in the following chapter, is very uncommon in the centuries prior to Gregory and virtually non-existent in the Christian West. In addition, he displays a particular dedication to Saint Martin and makes great efforts to seek out and compile his posthumous miracles. Therefore, an investigation into the specifics of healing cures presented in his texts demands an assessment of what Gregory's motivations may have been during his tenure as bishop.

Petersen argues that Gregory used his promotion of Saint Martin to gain fame and political sway for his diocese.[52] Indeed, this is easy to assume — after all, he presented his own blood relatives as saints in his hagiographies, gave his paternal family saint Julian his own book, and portrayed himself as a recurring beneficiary of Saint Martin's miracles (and by extension, his favor). In addition, because pilgrimage was such an integral part of the basilica's financial survival, it is also not unlikely that emphasizing specialized miracles of healing at Martin's tomb could have been designed to draw more people to this holy site.

But Tours was already a powerful diocese, and it has been made clear that his family held remarkable status in both the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. Moreover, Gregory seemingly went out of his way to downplay his relationship to his relatives. As Ian Wood points out, his mother Armentaria, with whom Gregory was dearly close, is only mentioned by name once in his texts, and even then, only as the granddaughter of Gregory of Langres.[53] Not even his great-uncle Nicetius of Lyons, who Gregory elevated to saintly status, was mentioned as a

[52] Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the* Great, 124.
[53] Ian Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*. Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions, v. 8. eds. Kathleen Mitchell and I. N. Wood. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 39.

blood relative.[54] According to Heinzelmann, in only three chapters out of the total 443 in the *History of the Franks* does Gregory both name and specify his relationship with his relatives.[55]

In addition, his presentation of himself is inconsistent across his works: he alludes to his political and ecclesiastical importance in his *Histories*, but barely appears as anything other than a humble recipient of saints' healing in his hagiographies. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but Wood hypothesizes that he may have wanted to disguise any possible prejudice he had for his family or patron saints, and moreover hide his involvement with the royal court and politics.[56] Heinzelmann concurs, stating that Gregory never intended for his works to be autobiographical, but focus instead on "an ideal society that is the Church of Christ."[57]

It is objectionable, according to Wood, that Gregory could be reduced to someone intent on manipulating the cult of saints and relics for his own benefit, stating that the approach would sell short his faith and commitment to the saints — "a belief which genuinely underpinned Gregory's understanding of his world, and coloured his description of it."[58] As Steven Justice has pointed out, attempting to explain the religious experiences of medieval people by looking for their unspoken ulterior motives is in fact a dismissal of their lived experiences.[59] While it is true that some of Gregory's miracles can often come across as moralizing, these same miracles were genuinely couched in his religious world; he simply presents cause and effect — including sickness and healing — according to the spiritual physics of his universe.

[54] Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," 40.
[55] Heinzelmann, "Elements of a Biography," 8.
[56] Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," 46.
[57] Heinzelmann, "Elements of a Biography," 34.
[58] Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," 39.
[59] Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103, no. 1 (August 1, 2008), 2.

1.2 Lives of Martin

1.2.1 The *vitae*

Supervision over the cult of Saint Martin in Tours was without question the greatest authority that Gregory would claim in his life, and an important tool for holding onto his ecclesiastical power and maintaining order in his community in the face of destabilizing threats.[60] This popular pilgrimage site was a key source of revenue, bringing in property, wealth, and status, which was in many ways fueled by its reputation for genuine religious experiences and healing miracles.[61] Martin was the most prominent saint in Gregory's healing miracle accounts, and who will be a consistent focus throughout this thesis. Consequently, an analysis of the development of the different *vitae* of Martin in its four iterations is essential to contextualize the healing miracles, particularly involving holy dust, highlighted in Gregory's version.

Besides Gergory's account, the most well-known of the *vitae* are Sulpicius Severus' (d. 425) and Venantius Fortunatus' (d. 610) versions, the latter which is a verse-paraphrase of the former.[62] Martin lived at the same time as Sulpicius, whose *vita* was begun only a short time after Martin's death, leaving little room for posthumous miracles. Moreover, this *vita* does not contain healing substances from churches or tombs, but does feature healing objects and acts of Martin — for example, a letter written by him is able to heal a girl of fever,[63] and the fringe of his garment could cure the sick.[64] Healing miracles of the saint himself include his use of a

[60] Wood, "The Individuality of Gregory of Tours," 33.
[61] John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings: And Other Studies in Frankish History*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 53.; Kitchen, "Gregory of Tours, Hagiography, and the Cult of the Saints," 389.
[62] This analysis uses Venantius' books I-II of his *vita Martini* out of a total of four. Unfortunately, books III-IV have remained elusive to me, and I am unable to include them here.
[63] Sulpitius [sic] Severus, *Life of Saint Martin,* XVII: "while his daughter was in agony from the burning fever of a quartan ague, inserted in the bosom of the girl, at the very paroxysm of the heat, a letter of Martin which happened to have been brought to him, and immediately the fever was dispelled."
[64] Sulpitius [sic] Severus, *Life of Saint Martin*, XIX: "threads from Martin's garment, or such as had been plucked from the sackcloth which he wore, wrought frequent miracles upon those who were sick."

paintbrush to cure an eye affliction,[65] and a kiss to heal a leper.[66] Sulpicius includes more miracles of Martin in his *Dialogues*, which features limited examples of holy substances. The only ingestion miracle (although not explicit) can be seen in Chapter II, in which the father of a girl born mute was healed by Martin, who blessed some oil and poured it into her mouth.[67]

Fortunatus' retellings of these miracles, written between 573 and 576, were subtly altered; many of his depictions of these same miracles seem to take on a much more viscous, or even "oily" quality, representing the shift from invisible to substantive holy power. In Fortunatus' version, the letter suddenly pours forth water to quench the fever,[68] the fringe of his garment brings about (along with his hands) a "flood of curative power,[69] the eye is healed from the oil flowing from his fingertips,[70] and the leper is not cured by the gesture of Martin's gracious kiss, but rather his saliva.[71] These changes in emotion and detail are understandable given that it was written in verse, especially from a man who N. M. Kay argues may have been catering to his audience with embellished miracles. To this effect, holy oil would have been very familiar to his general audience (due to its evergreen popularity in healing miracles), and admittedly, these alterations of language do not present literal substances but metaphorical. But one must consider that the liberal use of words like *salus, unguen, oleum*, and so on does create

[65] Ibid: "Martin touched his eye with a painter's brush, and, all pain being removed, thus restored it to its former soundness."
[66] Ibid: "he gave a kiss to a leper, of miserable appearance, while all shuddered at seeing him to do so."
[67] Sulpitius [sic] Severus and Alexander Roberts. *Dialogues*. from Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 11. eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3503.htm. 3.2: Martin "blesses a little oil, while he utters the formula of exorcism; and holding the tongue of the girl with his fingers, he thus pours the consecrated liquid into her mouth."
[68] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 2.20-25: "the parchment was laid on her as the girl lay back, and as soon as the dry writing poured forth the waters it exuded , the parching fever was removed from her internal organs."
[69] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 2.10: "Whatever part he touched by hand and whatever part touched him, a deep-reaching curative power spurted from his fingers, balm flowed from his fingertips. And furthermore whatever part of the noble fringe of his garment touched at any time, it dispensed a flood of curative power out of the modest garment …"
[70] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 2.35-44: "oil flowed from martin's fingers to the eye's lamp, surpassing all eye salves with his healing touch."
[71] Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 1.495-510: "... O blessed region who merit such a famous miracle of a famous man, from whose sacred mouth, outdoing all other miracles, the Jordan flowed in a kiss to cure a leper and the waters of saliva washed clean a found of flowing lesions!"

a certain image of a holy healing man and his miraculous medicines. In terms of influence, it is possible that Venantius may have informed Gregory's version given that the two men were contemporaries and friends, but considering Gregory's station and relationship with Saint Martin, I argue that this is not especially likely.[72] Nevertheless, Fortunatus' version is useful for considering how tangible substances became progressively more common in miracles accounts of the sixth century.

But there was a second verse-paraphrase written after Sulpicius and before Fortunatus that is often overlooked: that of Paulinus of Périgueux. This *vita* was written in the mid fifth century and made up of six books — the first five versified from Sulpicius (including the *Dialogues*), and the sixth his own addition of posthumous miracles supplied to him by the current bishop Perpetuus of Tours. Book six features Perpetuus in the following passage:

> The fortunate bishop Perpetuus, one who revered the Lord not only in name, and following in the footsteps of his gracious teacher, Martin, used to consecrate oil that had been brought to him with an unhesitating faith, in order that that famous spirit might bedew it, and a new air of a nearby grace might imbue it. When the venerable man wished to produce this remedy, and to make use of this good, well-known for all kinds of healings, he quickly scraped dust from the blessed marble. When mixed with the holy oil this dust doubled the oil's powers, so that thus the besprinkled fluid's doubled potency, when touched, would increase faith; when shared, would increase health. But when indeed oil sensed the proximity of the scant grain, swift grace raised the level of the olive oil upon contact, and swelling in volume it boiled over and overflowed. In the sight of all the oil's abundant plenty grew when the bishop added the holy gift of the powder. Rising higher than the mouth of its container, the diffusion of oil moistened the outside of the flask. Yet nevertheless, the overflowing gift did not sustain loss. It both shot upwards, flowing, and yet was always replenished.[73]

This valuable excerpt presents not just an oil increase and source of healing miracles, but also the first mention in all of the *vitae* of Martin's tomb dust as a healing agent, and even better, is dated to approximately a century before Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus. In general, according

[72] For discussion of the date of completion for Venantius' version, see N.M. Kay's introduction, 2-4.
[73] Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary," Book 6, miracle 8, verses 298-319.

to Bryan Ellis Mount, Paulinus' books one through five are more true to Sulpicius (i.e., healing the leper with a kiss), which makes his inclusion of dust entirely the product of Bishop Perpetuus.[74] Moreover, the absence of any holy dust in Fortunatus' version implies that Fortunatus himself was not familiar with the lesser known *vita* from Paulinus, nor with any existing dust miracles in Gaul.[75] This could be attributed to Fortunatus' background of growing up in Italy and only moving to Metz in his early 20's, leaving him unfamiliar with location-specific or lesser-known Gallic miracles.[76] Reasons aside, this passage proves dust miracles existed in Tours for at least a century before Gregory became bishop.

Gregory's own life of Martin began essentially the day he became bishop upon the death of his predecessor Bishop Euphronius in 573.[77] He proudly admits his familiarity with both Sulpicius' and Paulinus' versions, even retelling the dust miracle of Perpetuus in detail.[78] His first book of Martin was completed after eight years, but Gregory continued to expand on Martin's *vita* until his death in 594.[79] However, in contrast to the previous versions which emphasized the saint's miracles during his life, Gregory focuses almost exclusively on Martin's posthumous miracles and the wonders worked at his tomb.

1.2.2 Analysis and Conclusion

The sequential lives of Martin are important for the contextualization of Gregory's emphasis on dust miracles, along with other holy substances ingested or applied externally which enact miraculous healing. While Martin is the primary source of dust cures in Gregory's hagiographies, he was not the only saint that Gregory promoted, and not even the only one to

[74] Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary," 15.
[75] This assessment is limited to my access to books I-II of Fortunatus. It is possible that dust miracles may appear in these later books, but I believe that I-II are adequate in showing how holy healing substances become more present in Martin's hagiographies.
[76] Brian Brennan, "The Career of Venantius Fortunatus," *Traditio*, 41 (1985), 54.
[77] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 100.
[78] *VSM* 1.2
[79] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 102, 107: "his choices to begin writing *VSM* 3 around 581 and VSM 4 around 587."

feature healing dust (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). However, these *vitae* are useful in presenting the shift from miraculous and healing actions of the saint to the more tangible substances associated with the posthumous saint that arise in the sixth century version, even sometimes — in Fortunatus' case — in retelling the original miracle acts. What is most important to remember is that Gregory did not invent the healing powers of Saint Martin's dust, but the question remains why he chose this specific and seemingly unimportant material — only mentioned once before in Martin's hagiographies — to be the main vessel of healing power, especially when holy oil was already widely popular. The following chapter will explore the presence of dust outside of Gaul in an effort to find any relationship or influence from beyond Gregory's world.

Chapter 2: Influences: Early Christian Writers and the East

2.1 Introduction

Setting aside Gregory's life and context, this chapter will focus on potential influences for Gregory's dust and its medicinal application — namely, ingestion — by searching for analogous practices that could have informed both Perpetuus' intervention and Gregory's enthusiasm for this uncommon miracle. Gregory's use of dust certainly had an impact on later hagiographical works and authors,[80] but there are also cases of holy dust which were seemingly unrelated to him.[81] One might imagine that the Bible could be the ultimate point of reference, but unfortunately little is seen of miraculous dust or earth, except for one miracle of Jesus curing a man of blindness by mixing his saliva with dirt and applying the mud to the man's eyes.[82] Instead, the examination of early Christian writings yields a better understanding of these possible influences on Gregory.

2.2 Early Church Influences

The earliest sources that include holy dust are from the fourth and fifth centuries, but often were a symbolic and rhetorical feature used during the rise of relics. A heated early fifth century dialogue between Jerome (d. 420) and Vigilantius (fl. c. 400, a Gallic clergyman and contemporary of Sulpicius Severus) includes the mention of dust, although only Jerome's

[80] For instance, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* 3.9, 3.11, 4.3, 5.18.
[81] See Appendix
[82] John 9:1-7; for repeats of this practice in 15th century Ethiopia, see: Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A Translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium Maṣḥafa Senkesār* [transliterated from Ethiopic]. (Cambridge University Press, 1928).

response remains in *Contra Vigilantium*. In their exchange, this meager "dust" was used by Vigilantius to critique the uselessness and insignificance of relics, whose believers "introduced pagan customs into the Church and are guilty of idolatry."[83] But even though the description of "a worthless bit of dust and ashes" was meant to discredit the veneration of relics, Jerome was undeterred.[84] His retorts reflected the wider conviction among clergymen that even the smallest trace of the saint held great power "equal to that of an undivided martyr."[85] This position is reflected in an even earlier text from Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) in 380, who in his homily on Theodore the Recruit stated that "people who venerate the martyr are usually allowed to take no more than some dust from outside his grave, and that this is already a powerful relic."[86]

Paulinus of Nola (d. 431) in Italy also offers a surprising amount of holy dust, used almost synonymously with the term "ashes," in his fourth or early fifth century *Poems*. These were sometimes metaphorical but other times explicitly tangible, such as the miracle of holy dust increasing in such quantities that it erupted out of a saint's tomb, or an altar which "conceals the sacred ashes and fragrantly breathes forth the power of the holy dust."[87]

In addition, we find dust in the relics of the first century Saint Stephen, whose cult gained popularity in the early fifth century. Accounts of this dust are found in Augustine of Hippo's (d. 430) described that "favors from the dust of the dead" are granted through the power of God.[88] Another fifth century writer Lucian of Caphargamala (fl. c. 416) near Jerusalem

[83] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 197.
[84] Jerome of Stridon, *Contra Vigilantium.* trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 6. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), 8.
[85] Theodoret of Cyrrus, *Graecorum affectionum curatio*, ed. P. Canivet, SC 57 (1958), 10–11; Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 194; Anthony John Lappin, "Disturbing Bones from Grave Violation to Exaltation of the Relic," *Mirator* vol. 19, 1 (2018), 20.
[86] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 132.
[87] Paulin de Nole, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, 19.395, 21.583-643; for more metaphorical descriptions, see 19.363, 21.583, 27.395.
[88] Augustine, Edmund Hill, and John E. Rotelle. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1990), 317.1 "On the Martyr Stephen."; Anthony John Lappin, "Disturbing Bones," 146: "The sermon was clearly preached just after Stephen's relics (just small packets of dust from the recently discovered tomb) had arrived, and been distributed throughout the African provinces," and even more,

described the limbs of Saint Stephen which "left us small particles, but great relics: soil with dust [*terram cum pulvere*], where his entire body had been decomposed; the rest they took away," indicating that pilgrims had come to collect whatever speck of dust or dirt they could gather from the site of his death.[89]

The use of dust is further emphasized by a Gallic Bishop Avitus of Vienne (d. 519) who, writing to the Bishop Martin of Braga, stated that he would send "relics from the body of the blessed Stephen the first martyr," describing "some dust of the flesh and sinews (*pulverem carnis atque nervorum*)," as well as solid bones.[90] While admittedly these early accounts of dust are not presented as a catalyst of healing miracles, they are from a crucial period which informed Christian interactions with relics which could have contributed to the evolution of this venerated and medicinal holy substance in Tours.

2.3 Holy Dust Miracles Outside Gaul

Moving back to the fourth century, there exist two examples of healing dust in the Christian Mediterranean. One, credited to a certain Paphnouthios in upper Egypt, is the resurrection miracle of a stillborn baby using dust from the doorway of Apa Aaron, a living saint.[91] The second is from Gregory of Nazianzus' writing on the third century bishop and martyr of Carthage, Cyprian, featuring the passage:

> … the exorcising of demons, the elimination of sickness, the foreseeing of the future: all these things can be performed even by the dust of Cyprian, together with the faith, as those who have experienced them know — for they have passed down to us this wondrous story …[92]

that the presence of "little packets of dust from his recently discovered tomb in Palestine" (recently as of this article in 2018).

[89] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 170.

[90] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 172.

[91] Gesa Schenke. *Coptic Stories of the Monks of the Desert*. CSLA E00144. http://csla.history.ox. ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00144.

[92] Efthymios Rizos, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Oration 24, On Cyprian*. CSLA E00966. http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00966

Although Gregory of Tours has his own entry on Cyprian, he does not mention any kind of dust, but does credit the martyr as a saint who "often offers assistance to ill people who request his aid." This discrepancy is interesting given that "the dust of Cyprian" described as far back as the third century means not only that is this a dead saint, but that the effects are the closest to the ailments Gregory of Tours describes ("foreseeing of the future" notwithstanding). One would think that Gregory would be eager to repeat this miracle — possibly he was unaware of it.

Moving east, there is evidence that both Christian and a later Islamic usage of dust was informed by long-standing use of protective and curative substances, some of which — argued by David Frankfurter — indicate that some "pilgrimage shrine rites and functions carried over from native traditions into Christian guise."[93] Frankfurter specifically names the sites of Menouthis and Abu Mina (a site of production for pilgrim flasks discussed later in this chapter) from Late Antique Roman Egypt, where pilgrims could undergo incubation, dream-healing, and enjoy the distribution of spiritually powerful water, oil, and dust. In terms of what could be considered, in Frankfurter's words, "native traditions," the question of any relationship between Gregory's accounts and early Christian magic is unavoidable. Investigating possible connections here has proven unfruitful in the way of sacred healing dust, but in contrast, water, oil, and wine feature prominently in monks' spells as ingested substances of "magical" qualities, often accompanied by healing herbs, spices, oil, and resins.[94] Moreover, there is a notable use of amulets in these monks' spells containing oil or other substances which functioned as daily protection against spiritual and physical illness.[95] The main difference is

[93] David Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 37.
[94] Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 31, 63, 106, 245 are only a few examples.
[95] Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 98-101.

that these "magical" Christian amulets were powered by inscriptions rather than what they contained (in Gregory's case, the dust of saints' tombs or other relics).

Geographically, Syria provides some of the richest sources of dust and earth used as medicine. The third century apocryphal Acts of Thomas gives an early example of this substance as a healing contact relic:

> And king Mazdai took (some) of the dust of that spot where the bones of the apostle had lain and hung it on his son and … when he had hung (it) upon his son and had believed, he was healed.[96]

As discussed in the introduction, a difference emerged between saints' lives of the East and West during the fifth and sixth centuries: generally speaking, Christian writers from the Eastern Mediterranean world tended to favor living holy men as miracle workers, whereas Christian writers from the European West focused more on dead holy men and their miracle-working relics.[97] For instance, Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 466) described a hill on which the ascetic James lived, which became so blessed that pilgrims would come from all over to take the earth home as *prophylactica*.[98] This is even more evident in the extremely popular cults of Symeon Stylites the Elder as well as the Younger, the latter of which was a living saint and contemporary of Gregory of Tours.

Symeon is key for understanding how the East may have influenced western writers, including Gregory. Stylites — Christian ascetics who choose to live on top of columns or pillars — were often seen as an intermediary between heaven and earth, offering social support, political influence, spiritual access, miracles of healing, and altogether serving as a sort of

[96] Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text and Commentary*. 2nd rev. ed. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 108. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 250-251.
[97] Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the* Great, 116.
[98] Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium," 68.

celebrity-protector and guide for those in need.[99] Unfortunately for Symeon the Younger, the sixth century saw an onslaught of disasters, such as invasions, plague, and earthquakes — things which damaged his credibility as a mediator between God and his faithful believers. Stylites were already controversial figures, as their popularity was often felt as a threat to nearby bishops, and Symeon's increasingly divisive sermons did not aid him in this area.[100] But L.A.R. Parker argues that according to his *Vita*, the hagiographer chose to overwhelm the reader with an incredible amount of miracle stories to distract from this saint's situational shortcomings, so much that his *Vita* "contains perhaps more miracles than any other late antique saint's life."[101] Specifically, the hagiographer credits his healing miracles as the source of his popularity.

These healing miracles could come in the form of words, visions, or most often, the holy dust found at the base of his pillar.[102] This dust, like the hill of the ascetic James, was made of the red earth of Symeon's so-called Miraculous Mountain, which was then formed into tokens and pressed with the image of the saint and his column, resulting in a medallion about the size of a quarter. These tokens are an example of *eulogia* ("blessing" in Greek), which could also come in the form of small flasks containing oil or water, and were generally considered to be apotropaic or medicinal.[103] The image impressed into the holy dust created a dual impact of sacred power, similar to the bread stamps used for the eucharist: Gary Vikan argues that the image itself is a precursor to the "edible icons" of Byzantium, and the dust, by its proximity to the column, functioned as a contact relic.[104] The sacred power imbued in these tokens was

[99] L.A.R. Parker, "Symeon Stylites the Younger and his Cult in Context: Hagiography and Society in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Byzantium." PhD Dissertation. (University of Oxford, 2016), 218. See also Tamar Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth Century Gaul,"* 15.
[100] Parker, *Symeon Stylites the Younger,* 218.
[101] Parker, *Symeon Stylites the Younger,* 219.
[102] Gary Vikan, "Edible Icons," 56; Vikan, "Art, Medicine, and Magic," 68.
[103] Vikan, "Edible Icons," 55.
[104] Ibid.; for more on the significance of stamps and their use in eucharistic bread, see Volker Menze, "The power of the Eucharist in Early Medieval Syria: Grant for Salvation or Magical Medication?" in *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries*. eds. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Derek Krueger (Routledge, 2016.), 119.

thought to be highly effective against disease, either topically or internally: if used topically, it could either be rubbed on skin dry or mixed with water or saliva to make a sort of paste that could be applied to the afflicted area. Alternately, dust of the token could be scratched into water and drunk, used especially for intestinal disorders (with at least one mixture which included a piece of hair from Symeon himself).[105] The use of holy dust in Syria was apparently common enough to necessitate its own word: *hnana*, which translates to "grace,"[106] and according to Lizette Larson-Miller, was a "compound made of oil, dust, water and some ashes of the saints or earth from the floor of the martyria mixed in." Larson-Miller makes further note that healing *hnana* can be found as early as the fifth century in canon 64 by Bishop Maruta of Maipherqat (ca. 420):

> But if there is one who is sick and who is tempted by Satan, let him be brought to the churches… where there is the treasure of the bones of the saints. Oil and henana shall be given them [sic] and they shall offer a prayer over them.[107]

This holy man, Symeon the Younger, would have been the one to impact Gregory directly during his lifetime. However, there was another popular Symeon: the fifth century Symeon Stylites the Elder, clearly the inspiration for his sixth-century protégé. Symeon the Elder filled essentially the same role in his community, but importantly, *Bedjan's Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* describes his uses of healing holy dust a full century before Symeon of the sixth century — approximately the same time we see the first dust miracle of Martin. While the dust

[105] Vikan, "Edible Icons," 56.

[106] *Hnana* can also be translated as "pity" or "compassion." This substance is used for healing but its continuing importance is also indicated by its use in East Syrian traditional marriage rites which includes the blessing of a cup of wine mixed with *hnana* and followed by submerging a cross and ring into the mixture (see: Geoffrey Wainwright, ed. *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2006], 165). Although the collection and use of holy dust can be found in a diverse array of locations, the specific term and mixture suggest that this was common practice in Syria as a way of creating eulogia or contact relics. Additionally, tenth century clay tokens from the Great Mosque of Hims in Syria depicting half-man half-scorpion indicate that this practice was deeply culturally ingrained. See: Brandie Ratliff and Helen C. Evans eds., *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th-9th Century*. (New York: New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 250.

[107] Lizette Larson-Miller, "To Imitate their Perfection: A Comparison of the Relationship of Christology and Martyrial Liturgy in Sixth Century Gaul and Syria." PhD Dissertation. (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1992), 234.

in the Elder's miracles were most often applied externally, there is at least one incident in which a boy is cured of kidney stones with what almost directly corresponds to Gregory's descriptions of dust mixtures. In this story, after expensive doctors had failed to cure him, the boy's parents brought him to Symeon the Elder, who then instructed them to

> "Put some of that dust in it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and give to him to drink." And immediately when he drank of that water, our Lord gave him deliverance.[108]

2.4 Connections to Gregory

The question now is whether Gregory was aware of these eastern dust practices, and if so, if his choice of emphasizing Saint Martin's tomb dust was informed by them. For evidence towards the former, an interesting miracle involving the earth surrounding the tomb of Christ can be found early in Gregory's *Martyrs*:

> Marvelous power appears from the tomb where the Lord's body lay. Often the ground is covered with a natural radiant brightness; then it is sprinkled with water and dug up, and from it tiny [clay] tokens are shaped and sent to different parts of the world. Often ill people acquire cures by means of these tokens.[109]

This passage is particularly telling of his knowledge on earthen tokens and their connection to pilgrimages in the East. In fact, Gregory provides evidence of pilgrimages made by clergy, often under the direction of a superior, to go to the East and bring back relics.[110] His description of the tokens in the above passage indicate a familiarity with the acetic James' and Symeon Stylites' healing pilgrim tokens, and one which he aligns with the holiest tomb with no hint of

[108] Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites," 128.
[109] *GM*, 6.
[110] *VP* 8.6; *GM* 5.

doubt. It is likely that he was familiarized with this either through an easterner or clergy member returning from pilgrimage.

Moreover, the presence of easterners in his works is undeniable. In addition to Gallic saints, Gregory also included Spanish, Italian, North African, and most importantly, Eastern saints (11 out of a total of 106).[111] His descriptions reveal much about the potential eastern sources that Gregory may have had access to, and what information was available and popular enough to travel all the way to Gaul. In fact, as Tamar Rotman points out, there is a degree of geographic separation in Glory of the Martyrs in which foreign saints are grouped together — a "rule" which, according to Rotman, is broken at least twice in order to assert ownership of the more popular eastern saints (specifically, Polycarp and George).[112] Gregory's inclusion of non-Gallic saints in his hagiographies, sources which are often geographically insular, is noteworthy in and of itself.[113]

Gregory's eastern saints are a heterogeneous bunch; there are no consistent qualities or trends that can distinguish them in terms of popularity, miracle type, or even whether they were venerated in Gaul at all. This last point is surprising: at least four of the eastern saints were completely unknown to Gallic communities before Gregory provided the first (and sometimes only) Latin accounts.[114] This is a strong indicator that he was a source and disseminator of information — for example, Gregory is responsible for the earliest western accounts of the popular Syrian martyr Sergius as well as the 40 Martyrs of Sebaste.[115] This group also includes the popular eastern story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, which Gregory admits he was only

[111] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 47, 52.
[112] A preference possibly due to Gregory's assistance in a mass for Polycarp in his youth; see *GM* 85.
[113] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 26.
[114] *GM*, 94 (The Seven Sleepers), 96 (Sergius), 99 (Domitius), as some examples.
[115] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 62, 67.

able to translate from Syriac into Latin with the help of a Syrian named Johannes — a significant statement regarding eastern and western interactions in Gaul (and with the clergy, no less).[116]

Gregory clearly had access to eastern sources, whether they be Syrian saints' lives or more secular accounts. Averil Cameron asserts that Gregory was indeed familiar with Byzantine secular texts due to the specific political events and opinions describing Byzantine emperors Justin II and Tiberius II, which a little too accurately reflect the writings of Evagrius (who happened to actively interact with Symeon the younger) and John of Ephesus.[117] Between his access to eastern sources, personal help from a speaker of Syriac, and several descriptions of Syrian individuals in Bordeaux and Paris, as well as Syrian speakers in the population in Orleans,[118] it is clear that Syrians — or easterners in general — were very much present in Gaul, and likely carried with them some amount of cultural or religious influence.

Returning to the varied representations of eastern saints in his collection, the popularity of these incoming saints is also significant. For instance, despite the lack of evidence of Gallic veneration, Cosmas and Damian were well known in both East and West by the fifth century. This pair was used by Gregory as a geographic reference point when describing lesser known saints, indicating the possibility that the more obscure saints came along on the backs of the popular and well-known holy men.[119] I would suggest the possibility that Gregory's direct engagement with Syrians may have been with individuals from the areas of these lesser known saints, who contributed their local saints' stories to Gregory's miracle accounts which would otherwise have remained unknown.

[116] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 57.
[117] Averil Cameron, "The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 26, no. 2 (1975), 422.
[118] *Historiae,* 7.31, 10.26, 8.1.
[119] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 77.

Presenting these eastern saints was not just a means of collecting, but also elevating: his accounts of Sergius as well as Cosmas and Damian describe their relics placed in the baptistry near the church of Saint Martin, which for Gregory and the population of Tours would have been a place of high honor, reverence, and respect.[120] Given their place of honor, it is even possible that Gregory was familiar enough with them to know of the miracle of the sick woman who was cured by drinking a mixture of water and scrapings of a fresco depicting Cosmas and Damian.[121]

The above analysis only includes ten of the eleven eastern saints found in Gregory, the last of which is Symeon Stylites the Younger himself. While the Elder has his own entry,[122] the Younger does not feature in his own miracle account, but instead is mentioned in a story of a budding western stylite who was discouraged by local bishops, saying "It is not right, what you are trying to do! Such an obscure person as you can never be compared with Simeon the Stylite of Antioch!"[123] It would seem that the presence of Syrians and the popularity of Symeon was enough to make the bishops nervous since, as previously mentioned, stylites could be disruptive to the ecclesiastical order. But although Gregory was clearly familiar with both Symeons, he does not provide any miracles involving dust. Of the eastern saints, posthumous healing is vague and only seen from a limited few, and the only miracle of ingesting anything that could be interpreted as medicine is Gregory's report on healing water from the well inside Saint Isidorus' church.[124] For Gregory, holy dust was reserved for the saints of Gaul.

[120] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 72; *Historiae*, 10.31.
[121] Cyril A. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents*. Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 139. Miracle 15: "The woman then develops a bad case of colic and happens to be left alone in her house. Perceiving herself to be in danger, she crawled out of bed and, upon reading the place where these most wise Saints were depicted on the wall, she stood up leaning on her faith as upon a stick and scraped off with her fingernails some plaster. This she put into water and, after drinking the mixture, she was immediately cured of her paints by the visitation of the Saints." There are otherwise no similar accounts of healing mixtures in the miracles of Cosmas and Damian.
[122] *GC* 26
[123] *Historiae*, 8.15. These bishops would then proceed to knock this column down once the would-be stylite had descended.
[124] *GM*, 101.

2.5 Easterners in Gaul

There still lies the question of if, before the time of Paulinus' *Life of Martin,* there was an established Syrian minority in Gaul, and how it may have impacted the emergence and continuation of medicinal dust cures in the West. One possibility noted by Rotman is the social and demographic effects in the West of the Chalcedonian schism in 451. This resulted in the Syrian Orthodox Church, but also in the persecution of non-Chalcedonians who fled to new places, such as Byzantium or westward.[125] However, even if all the fleeing Syrians had chosen to go to Gaul, I do not believe this event could have impacted the Gallic population significantly enough to influence (or even create) local miracles by the time of Paulinus' writings in the 460s.

A more likely reason for a developed Syrian population in Gaul is the increase in trade between East and West in the fifth century (although there is evidence of eastern merchants far before).[126] Arnaldo Momigliano argues for the presence of Syrian individuals in Gaul as far back as the third century, citing a funerary inscription in Lyons for a Syrian man named Ioulianos Euktenios, a respected merchant between the East and West.[127] Wolfram Drews acknowledges that even in the imperial period, Gaul had certain eastern aspects as seen in eastern bishops and particular liturgies, stating that "monasticism in the Rhône valley was marked by a strong oriental character." By the Merovingian period, according to Rotman, there was evidence of eastern colonies in Gallic towns.[128] Anthea Harris even points out that the Auvergne — Gregory's home turf — may have had links with the East indicated by church architecture in Clermont.[129] However, this was not always pleasing to the locals; Salvian of

[125] Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 93.
[126] Wolfram Drews, "Migrants and Minorities in Merovingian Gaul," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Merovingian World*. eds. Effros, Bonnie, and Isabel Moreira. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 119.
[127] Arnaldo Momigliano, "An Inscription from Lyons and the Language Situation in Gaul in the Third and Fourth Centuries A.D." *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 12, no. 3 (1982), 1109.
[128] Drews, "Migrants and Minorities," 119; Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity,* 57.
[129] Anthea Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West: The Archeology of Cultural Identity AD 400-650*. (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 131.

Marseilles, a fifth century writer and resident of Gaul, expressed annoyance about "crowds of Syrian merchants who have occupied the greater part of nearly all cities."[130]

This eastern element described by Drews is supported by the presence of pilgrimage flasks from Abu Menas, which can be found along trade routes running up the Rhône to Lyons and then towards Normandy in the northwest.[131] The production of these pilgrims' flasks began in fifth century Egypt, and it is probable that these flasks were manufactured in order to accommodate the increase in pilgrimage during the fourth century. Their presence in Gaul may simply reflect that pilgrims or clergy returned home with them, but, as noted by Harris, it is not unlikely that pilgrims traveled alongside merchants, possibly even sharing transportation.[132] She also notes the likely possibility that merchants moving between Egypt and Gaul may have stopped in Syria to visit the extremely popular Saint Symeon Stylites, and if this were the case, then Syrian and Egyptian traders may have been more connected than previously thought.[133]

In Gregory's accounts, there are several examples confirming a distinct Syrian presence in Gaul. The first is from a fourth century Syrian merchant by the name of Eusebius who bribed his way into becoming the bishop of Paris, and who then "dismissed the entire household of his predecessor and replaced them by a number of other Syrians."[134] The second is a Syrian in Bordeaux named Euphronius in the second half of the sixth century who kept a fingerbone of Saint Sergius in his home, converting it into a shrine.[135] The third is the entry of King Guntram (d. 592) into Orleans, who was greeted by "a vast crowd of citizens," in which "the speech of the Syrians contrasted sharply with that of those using Gallo-Roman and again with that of the

[130] Salvian, and Jeremiah Francis O'Sullivan. *The Writings of Salvian, the Presbyter*. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 115.
[131] Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, 68, 136.
[132] Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West,* 136.
[133] Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, 69.
[134] *Historiae*,10.6.
[135] *Historiae*, 7.31.

Jews, as they each sang his praises in their own tongue."[136] This last example is most interesting to me, as it demonstrates that there was a diverse enough community in Orleans to maintain social linguistic identities of Syrian speakers (as well as Hebrew, as also mentioned in the account). More subtle is Gregory's description of a crowd surrounding the tomb of Saint Nicetius in sixth century Lyons, "some taking from the priest in attendance pieces of wax for a blessing (*pro benedictione*), others a little dust, and others plucked and went away with a few threads from the fringe of the tomb-covering, all thus carrying off for different purposes the same grace (*gratia*) of health."[137] As noted by Wiśniewski, the choice of words here seems to be very specific and correspond almost directly to the translations of *eulogia* (blessing) and *hnana* (grace), suggesting the possibility of imported customs and terms from the East.[138]

Although the evidence from fifth century Tours is extremely scarce, it is indeed possible that certain miracle traditions migrated along with easterners as they entered Gaul in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, and may have impacted the development in their respective understandings of saints and relics. If late antique Gallic travelers can offer any indication as to the contemporaneous attitudes towards easterners, foreign practices regarding the cult of relics were not met with intolerance or disgust, but "incited, rather, curiosity, if not enthusiasm."[139]

2.6 Conclusion

Returning to the early Christian texts, it is in the fourth and fifth centuries that Western Christian writers begin to mention dust (whether symbolically or literally), with some only a few decades before Paulinus' account of holy dust in Tours. Importantly, the writings of Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, Augustine of Hippo, and Lucian of Caphargamala (as well as fourth

[136] *Historiae*, 8.1.
[137] *VP*, 8.6.
[138] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 210-211.
[139] Wiśniewski, *Cult of Relics*, 212.

century Gregory of Nyssa) do not feature descriptions of any curative effects of holy dust, and treat it simply as a relic worthy of veneration. In contrast, Bishop Maruta of Maipherqat, Paphnouthios, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Symeon Stylites' hagiographer specifically include healing abilities as a reliable attribute of holy dust, regardless of if the saints were living or dead.

In this chapter, I have delivered evidence of a distinct Syrian presence in various communities in Gaul, and it is clear from Gregory's work that he was familiar with and personally interacted with Syrians. Harris has addressed the notion that the term "Syrian" may have been used as a catch-all for easterners in general. However, she makes the point that Syrians had already been active in the West as traders for centuries before Gregory, the writers describing them were familiar with other regional eastern identities, and that Syria played a very important role in the Byzantine empire between the fifth to seventh centuries.[140] Gregory demonstrates respect and curiosity for these eastern holy men, promoting obscure saints and elevating popular ones in his personal diocese. In the broad spectrum of substance miracles in the West occurring before the time of Gregory, dust makes up a small fraction, and more often the focus is on water or oil. The latter certainly appear in Gregory's miracles and saint's lives, but the proportions are not equal: Gregory emphasizes the dust of Gallic saints — especially Martin — as a distinct local feature.

[140] Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West*, 63.

Chapter 3: Healing in Sixth Century Gaul

3.1 Introduction

Surveying the prevailing notions of medicine in the post-Roman West and its role in the sixth century is essential for situating Gregory's healing miracles in his community. During his life, there were three categories of healers one could choose from: secular physicians, soothsayers, and saints. Each will be explored according to Gregory's descriptions, opinions, and anxieties, as well as the more subtle information he provides on their functions in the community. Gregory naturally presents saints as the superior healers, but there were also different mechanisms by which the "patient" could obtain healing. These mechanisms can be imagined in the form of a sliding scale between acts of penance and simply possessing a holy substance or object procured from a saint's tomb.

A few disclaimers must be made about using Gregory as a source to recover evidence about his contemporaneous healers. His work is admittedly biased and frequently hostile sources, and cannot accurately place physician, soothsayer, or even saint in the hierarchy of Merovingian society. However, the tension and anxiety with which they are described does attribute social importance to both competitors. Despite these issues, there is still much to glean from his texts.

3.2 Physicians

The Late Antique West was deeply steeped in Galenic humoral theory, especially among the secular physicians. The notion that medicine was rejected according to its incompatibility with Christianity is no longer the common consensus among scholarship

(thanks to scholars such as Edward James, Valerie J. Flint, and Allen E. Jones) who have applied a more anthropological approach in recent decades.[141] This has created space for the study of Merovingian medicinal practices and an appreciation for its cultural context. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the *medicus* had a central place in Gallic society. For instance, Caesarius Bishop of Arles (d. 543) seemed to understand the necessity of secular medics, and Pope Gregory the Great urged his friends to seek physicians for their ailments.[142] Generally speaking, professional doctors were familiar, distinguished, skilled, learned, and frequently expensive.[143]

The physician at this time was a medical practitioner who had nothing to do with the spiritual well-being of the patient and tended only to physical maladies. Gregory's descriptions of them were not particularly favorable, warning his readers of their incompetence or even danger.[144] However, Gregory himself sought out secular physicians, sometimes even as a first response; within his second month as bishop in Tours, Gregory came down with a case of dysentery and found himself at death's door in his country house. In an act of desperation, he called upon his physician (chief physician, in fact) Armentarius, whom he admonishes:

> You have applied all the resources of your art, you have already tried the strength of all your ointments, but no earthly thing is of any use to the one who is about to perish."[145]

Gregory turned then, finally, to the dust of Martin tomb, which after being mixed with water and drunk, cured him immediately.

[141] For previous scholarly assumptions about the use of medicine during Late Antiquity: Gundolf Keil, for example, argued that Merovingians rejected Roman medical knowledge because it did not align with Christianity. See Gundolf Keil and Paul Schnitzer, *Das Lorscher Arzneibuch und die frühmittelalterliche Medizin: Verhandlungen des Medizinhistorischen Symposiums im September 1989* in Lorsch. Geschichtsblätter Kreis Bergstrasse Sonderband 12. (Lorsch: Verl. Laurissa, 1991.).
[142] John Kitchen. "Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers: The Dynamics of Healing in Gregory of Tours' De Virtutibus Sancti Martini." *Florilegium* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 1993), 20; Caesarius, *Sermons,* 52.
[143] For the costliness of physicians, see Caesarius, *Sermons,* 5.5, 57.1.
[144] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 252-253.
[145] *VSM* 2.1.

Another incident in which Gregory opted for secular treatment before resorting to holy medicine is his account of a six-day intestinal upset, during which (he "confesses") he sought relief in baths and warm compresses to his stomach.[146] As said by John Kitchen, similarly to Gregory's previous account, "there is nothing in the passages cited that suggests Gregory prematurely sought divine intervention."[147] Resorting again to the mercy of Saint Martin, he replaced his secular compress with an extremely minimal spiritual alternative of a simple thread from the cloth hanging from the tomb, which he then put under his clothes and sealed with the sign of the cross. The pain ceased immediately, and he was cured.

These stories are interesting in that Gregory presents Martin in the context of secular medicine's shortcomings, but also for his apparent faith that the doctor could conceivably cure him.[148] The question of Gregory's familiarity with secular medicine has been raised, and for good reason: according to Edward James, twenty eight medical terms (mostly Greek) appear in Gregory's works, including specific medicinal herbs and Galenic terms describing melancholic dispositions.[149] In addition, Gregory mentions at least three times the use of cupping vessels, or heated cups designed to draw impurities out of the body in order to rebalance the humors.[150] Physicians were abundant according to Gregory, who noted their practices in the urban centers of Tours, Bourges, Langres, and Vienne, as well as the existence of doctors in monasteries and nunneries (although little is known about these individuals).[151]

But despite Gregory's apparent knowledge, he still handled the physician with skepticism and concern in his writings — possibly in order to distance these popular healers

[146] *VSM* 4.1
[147] Kitchen. "Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers," 17.
[148] Ibid.
[149] James, "A Sense of Wonder," 55.
[150] *Historiae*, 5.6; 5.34; 7.22
[151] Edward James, "A Sense of Wonder" 54.

from his miraculous saints. Even beyond his own personal examples, he relished any opportunity to emphasize a physician's failures. In the *Vita Martini*, he borders on gloating:

> Have doctors ever done such a thing with their instruments of iron, since they practice the business of pain more than of healing when, with the eye swollen and pierced with needles, they fashion the torments of death rather than clear the vision?[152]

The failures of physicians were often used as evidence for the saints' superior healing abilities. For instance, an epileptic treated by "various remedies offered by doctors" was temporarily relieved, but could not be permanently cured until visiting the tomb of Nicetius of Lyons.[153] Venantius Fortunatus also included in his *Vita Germani* a story in which Attila, a member of the royal court, almost died after being bled by a physician. Thankfully, Saint Germanus was able to revive him within an hour simply through prayer and some cold water.[154] Paulinus of Nola (d. 431) drives this point home in his praise of Saint Felix (at the expense of secular healers):

> No fee did I pay the doctor, no loathing for my bed did I endure; my body did not undergo the remedy of scalpel or cautery or sharp-toothed potion made from sundry herbs—a healing harsher than the disease or the wound. This is the fate of those attended by the dubious skill of the human hand, whose soothing touch and doubtful relief always make us fearful. … My only words were a prayer, my sole medicine was faith.[155]

But ultimately, Gregory did not want to get rid of physicians. Secular doctors had their place as a buffer, or even as Flint puts it, the "fall guys" to demonstrate the superiority of Christian spiritual healers. His disdain for them may have been the result of being threatened

[152] *VSM* 2.19
[153] *VP*, 8.8.
[154] James T. Palmer, "Merovingian Medicine Between Practical Art and Philosophy." *Traditio* 78 (2023), 38; Kent Navalesi, Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Venantius Fortunatus, Life of Germanus of Paris." (BHL 3468). CSLA E06714. http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06714. 60.
[155] Johannes Quasten, Walter J. Burghardt, and Thomas Comerford Lawler, eds. *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation.* (New York: Newman Press, 1975), 277.

by their popularity and medical efficacy, which "impinged upon how Gregory viewed his own social leadership as a healer of souls."[156] However, the secular physicians were far and away a better option than the soothsayers: "the doctor emerges as the occupant of a middle position, one a little below the saint but a long way above the enchanter," who was the real threat to the community.[157]

3.3 Wizards and Soothsayers

For people in Gaul in search of more supernatural healing, there was another option: the dangerous "pagan" soothsayers. Gregory describes these treacherous individuals as deadly consorts of the devil — essentially, the antithesis of the saint in that she or he provides spiritual healing, but from evil sources. Although his is a biased and hostile source (as previously discussed), there is much to be learned from Gregory about the popularity and practices of folk medics.

The wife of one of Gregory's servants became mute after a seizure, and opted to call a soothsayer (or in this case, "wizard") who "administered ligaments of herbs and words of incantations but, as usual, they were not able to give a cure to the dying woman."[158] In the end, she was saved from the edge of death by Gregory's own niece, who administered holy oil from Saint Martin's tomb to the woman. Another revealing tale is from when Gregory was only a deacon on his way to visit the shrine of his family saint, Julian, to ask for protection against a plague breakout. One of his servants became seriously ill, prompting another servant to call in a soothsayer without Gregory's knowledge. This "sorcerer" went about his business "murmuring incantations, casting lots, and hanging amulets around the patient's neck," who

[156] Palmer, "Merovingian Medicine," 44.
[157] Flint, "The Early Medieval 'Medicus," 127.
[158] *VSM* 4.36

got worse and shortly thereafter died.[159] However, after a secondary servant began showing signs of the same sickness, Gregory intervened and administered a drink of dust from the tomb of Julian mixed with water, which immediately broke his fever. Gregory's concluding remarks declare that these soothsayers "never do anything useful for the sick," and that "the slightest quality of dust from the basilica is more powerful and these men with their foolish remedies."[160]

There were a variety of ways by which the soothsayer would deliver her or his medicine, as seen in the use of herbs, incantations, casting lots, and amulets or ligatures. Sometimes physical action was required; an account of a "pretender" by the name of Desiderius performed strange and dangerous methods to cure those with disabilities or paralysis (who he "ordered to be stretched forcibly," tugging on hands and other parts of the body "until it seemed that his sinews must snap. Those who were not many cured his servants sent away half dead").[161] Desiderius also claimed to possess holy relics, but upon inspection only had a bag containing "roots of various plants … moles' teeth, the bones of mice, bears' claws and bear's fat," which was thrown into the river after being recognized as witchcraft.[162]

Despite Gregory's revulsion for these individuals, the question remains of how popular they actually were, and where they sat in the hierarchy of healers. Evidently, soothsayers and sorcerers were still popular go-to healers, especially in rural areas (possibly due to the costliness of physicians which only city-dwellers could afford).[163] An example of this can be found in the story of a man, Aquilinus, who "lost his senses." His family at first "followed the custom of country people and brought him ligatures and potions from sorcerers and wizards," but when these did not help his condition, his family finally sought the help of Saint Martin by bringing

[159] *VSJ*, 45
[160] *VSM* 1.27: This account references a different miracle involving a Charivald, who had been paralyzed after an injury during a hunt. Through fasting and prayer for a year, he was healed and returned home.
[161] *Historiae*, 9.6
[162] Ibid.
[163] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 264. Jones has generously provided a series of examples attesting to this in Gregory's works: *Historiae*, 5.35, 5.5, 7.22, 7.25, 8.31; *VSM* 2.1; *GM,* 84.

him to the church.[164] After a period of praying and sober living, Aquilinus is said to have "forgotten his parents" and renounced the *rusticas* of the countryside, including the pagan practices ingrained in that culture. Ultimately, he was healed and continued to serve the church in exchange for his continued health.

What is interesting about all the above tales involving soothsayers is that they seem to be familiar healers in the minds of average people. The mute wife of one of Gregory's servants had been working in the fields before her seizure, indicating that she was not necessarily connected to the church and, according to her customs, had perhaps turned to the time-tested methods of "pagan" spiritual healing.[165] Even among those with connections to the church or familiarity with the general Christian worldview, alternative supernatural healing still had a place for them. This can be seen when Aquilinus' family believed his affliction to be "an incursion of the devil," yet did not seek any sort of Christian spiritual healer.[166] Even more clear is the story of Gregory's own servants on their way to the tomb of Julian to ask for protection against a sickness sweeping the countryside. Nevertheless, they first went to a soothsayer, despite the Christian nature of their journey.[167] Even in the account of Desiderius the pretender, the "country folk" of Tours (who regardless of customs would have been very familiar with Saint Martin and the tenets of Christianity) went to him for his proto-chiropractic promises of a cure.[168] In all of these tales involving soothsayers, not only was the world of secular medicine completely bypassed, but the miracles of saints as well.

This may create the assumption that people generally held a positive view of non-Christian supernatural healers, but there is another story in which a traveling cleric encountered

[164] *VSM* 1.26.
[165] *VSM* 4.36
[166] *VSM* 1.26
[167] *VSJ* 45. It might be important to note that this was before Gregory's tenure as bishop, said to be during the time of Cautinus' episcopate in Clermont, which lasted from 551—571. Gregory was consecrated in 573.
[168] *Historiae*, 9.6: "I myself was not there, so the country folk flocked to him in crowds …"

a young man in a town who suddenly fainted upon the cleric's arrival. The cleric was immediately accused of murder with "magic arts," but was able to prove his innocence by curing the young man with holy relics (which then expelled a demon — indeed, the source was a spiritual affliction).[169] This story reveals that even though soothsayers and wizards were summoned for medical help, they were also feared.

Between physicians and soothsayers, a hierarchy begins to form in Gregory's writings. Doctors were well-meaning (and probably Christians themselves), but ultimately unreliable and could only treat physical symptoms rather than spiritual causes. However, they were allies against the soothsayers and sorcerers — who were completely unacceptable — and therefore could be included in the Christian world; Allen Jones makes the note that soothsayers and physicians occupied separate spheres of society both by their methods and audiences.[170] Gregory even offers evidence of secular doctors working alongside Christian spiritual healers to increase their efficacy: "In this illness, the art of physicians could not achieve anything, except for when the Lord's help was present."[171] Especially in regards to monastic medicine, Palmer observes that the possibility of physicians and Christian healers (or institutions) working together was probable — especially given that an institution would provide relevant texts.[172] Ultimately, soothsayers and folk healers were no match against physicians, let alone saints.

3.4 Secular Elements in Christian Healing

Now that the stage is set, the questions of how saints fit into this world of healers, and how Christian medicine worked both spiritually and physically, can finally be explored. On a physical level, Bonnie Effros points to an intersection between Christian healing substances

[169] *VSJ* 44.
[170] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 263.
[171] *VSM*, 3.34.
[172] Palmer, "Merovingian Medicine," 33-34.

and Galenic humoral theory, specifically the importance of ingestion: as "oral therapies" were the most effective means to rebalance humors, ingested remedies became commonly accepted among the various healers as the most effective means of administration.[173] The relationship between health and ingestion can also be seen in fasting and abstinence for religious reasons — both could rebalance the body, but also make one more holy through self-denial and control.[174] Jerome suggested that fasting would cool the body, whereas meat and wine (highly indulgent) would elicit the inverse.[175] Even the Eucharist, arguably the most powerful means of spiritual healing, is ingested.

Venantius contextualizes the miracle-working holy oil of Saint Germanus in humoral theory, stating that it was able to rebalance the humors by both absorbing and drying out liquid, alluding to, as noted by James Palmer, "the warming properties of oil in Hippocratic medicine and its descendants."[176] Gregory himself, when describing a miracle which happened to him in his youth, explained his fever in Galenic terms as the product of his stomach being "filled with a great quantity of phlegm."[177] Faith Wallis calls attention to the following details of the story: Gregory was later brought to the church of Saint Illidius and, after promising to become a cleric, was struck by "a great nose-bleed," and left in good health. Wallis points out that nosebleeds in the Hippocratic corpus indicated different things, but a big nosebleed was almost always good: "It signals the breaking of fever, the restoration of hearing and lucidity, and a favorable crisis."[178] Gregory was not outside the world of medicine and even counted physicians among his friends, which explains some of his familiarity and awareness of medical terms and

[173] Bonnie Effros. *Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul*. 1. ed. The New Middle Ages. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 62.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Palmer, "Merovingian Medicine," 18.
[177] *VP*, 2.2.
[178] Faith Wallis, "Gregory of Tours' Nosebleed," in *Une traversée des savoirs*, ed. Philippe Heuzé and Yves Herant (Laval, 2008), 422.

practices.[179] These examples reveal that there was some familiarity with humoral theory among the religious elites who would have been documenting miracles, which may have had an impact on their hagiographies.

But except for the limited examples to the contrary, Gregory's portrayal of saintly healers was rooted much more in the spiritual than the medical. There have been interpretations of his miracles which suggest they were predominantly symbolic and metaphorical: Giselle de Nie has done remarkable work on the mental and emotional world of Gregory, and reads deep into the symbolism of elements, signs, portents, and dreams as they appear in his miracle accounts.[180] Under this interpretation, Gregory's stories and hagiographies perform a didactic and allegorical function which serves to communicate and uphold God's will. As such, this interpretation is less concerned with the immediate contexts and focuses instead on Gregory's inner landscape and the moral lessons necessary to maintain an orderly and honest society.[181]

However, it is important to keep in mind Edward James' warning of being misled by a literary or exclusively sociological interpretation of miracle stories, which would misrepresent the lived experiences and mentality of those in the sixth century.[182] Justice as well makes the important point that didactic accounts necessitate the teller consciously prioritizing the morals rather than having faith in the account.[183] Many of Gregory's stories indeed appear metaphorical — especially concerning the association of demons and exorcism with the expulsion of putrid bodily substances[184] — but this approach fails to consider the specific details, attention, and importance that Gregory gives to accounts of miraculous healing, and

[179] Wallis, "Gregory of Tours' Nosebleed," 423.
[180] See: Giselle De Nie, *Views From a Many Windowed Tower* (1987).
[181] Selim Tezcan, "Curing the Body, Curing the Society: The Miracle Stories of Gregory of Tours in the Service of Ascetical Socio-Moral Reform in Sixth-Century Gaul" (Masters Thesis, Bilkent Universitesi, 2004), 143.
[182] Edward James, "A Sense of Wonder" 48.
[183] Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe," 7.
[184] *VSM* 3.59, for a colorful example.

does not appreciate the medical understanding or practical elements in Gregory's narrative.[185] While the symbolic value is important, room must also be left for the interpretation of medical conceptualizations in these texts.

3.5 Saints

Gregory was convinced that saints were superior doctors in both body and soul. Over and over, he references Saint Martin as a "true doctor,"[186] a "skilled physician to purge our illnesses, wash our wounds, and grant us health-giving remedies,"[187] and especially the grand declaration at the end of VSM book 3:

> O indescribable remedy! O ineffable balm! O praiseworthy antidote! O heavenly purgative, so to speak, that beats the skill of physicians, outdoes the fragrance of herbs, and surpasses the strength of all ointments! It cleanses the stomach like scammony, the lungs like hyssop, and purifies the head itself like pyrethrum! Not only does it restore disabled limbs but — what is greater than all these things — it wipes away and eases the very strains of one's conscience![188]

The mention of scammony, hyssop, and pyrethrum all further indicate that Gregory was familiar with herbal remedies, and Wallis makes a particular note that these ingredients were in fact somewhat exotic, indicating that he likely had access to a book of herbal medicine.[189] But most importantly, the statement that saints had the ability to cure the conscience elevated them far beyond simple physicians. While indeed an illness could be the result of a physical issue, secular doctors could not compete against the saint's ability to banish demons or absolve sin, and so could not truly treat the root cause of the illness (even if they were often able to suppress the symptoms for a time).[190] According to Peter Brown, Gregory's world was built on the notion

[185] Wallis, "Gregory of Tours' Nosebleed," 417.
[186] *VSM* 2.52.
[187] *VSM*, Book 3 Prologue.
[188] *VSM*, 3.60.
[189] Palmer, "Merovingian Medicine," 39.
[190] Edward James, "A Sense of Wonder" 57-58; Kitchen. "Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers," 22.

that both good and bad were consequences directly aligned with sin, a backdrop against which all other distinctions would fade.[191] The physician offered nothing regarding the spiritual root issues, nothing emotional, no prayer, and no redemption, resulting in mere physical cures as secondary achievements.[192] As Gregory declares, "Why, therefore, do you marvel if we little men do little things, curing the lame and the blind? Even doctors can do this with their art."[193]

But be warned, if the cause of an affliction was spiritual in nature, the saints could revoke a cure if bad behavior was continued or promises were broken: a paralyzed pagan girl was healed after performing vigils at Saint Martin's tomb, but after returning to "the vomit of her idolatry" became paralyzed once again.[194] Even religious authorities were not spared: Archdeacon of Bourges at first sought healing from multiple physicians for his cataracts, but was only healed after fasting at the church of Saint Martin. But when he approached a Jewish doctor later to reinforce his healing, he became blind again, and no amount of fasting or praying to Saint Martin could heal him.[195]

However, the saints were not without mercy; in Gregory's accounts, the punishments he presented over his pastoral worries were not absolute. Even more than these stories of punishments were acts of grace, in which those who transgressed were made aware (usually physically) of their sin and restored to health after performing the proper acts of penance.[196] In the eloquent words of Wallis,

> Gregory imagined the body as the arena in which spirit and flesh wrestle for supremacy. The sign of the spirit's triumph is a body immune to disintegration,

[191] Peter Brown, "Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours." In *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 232.
[192] Kitchen, "Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers," 25, 22.
[193] *VSM*, 3.60.
[194] *VSM*, 1.2. The term "pagan" is specifically used by Gregory in this case.
[195] *Historiae* 5.6; Gregory's antisemitism is seen here, especially because the sin was not that he approached secular doctors after his cure, but that he "sought the help of a Jew."
[196] Kitchen, "Saints, Doctors, and Soothsayers," 30, footnote 26. "I refer only to a few of the many instances in the VSM where this occurs: 2.13, 46; 3.3, 7, 29; -1.-15."

bounded and closed in supernatural homeostasis, like the saints whose remains are exhumed uncorrupted years after their deaths.[197]

3.6 Between Soothsayers and Saints

While the power of the saints was vastly superior to the other options, one is bound to notice the similarity of actual techniques between the "good guys" (saints) and the "bad guys" (soothsayers). Both holy medicine and soothsayers' magic relied on the spiritual realm in order to heal, and indeed, their methods were very much alike. Amulets and ligatures were popularly employed on both sides, as well as divinatory practices — either by casting lots or using the gospels — which Jones argues were "controversial actions in Gaul, although undoubtedly popular, especially among ecclesiastics."[198] Amulets were also multi-use, sometimes bordering on the magical: besides healing and protection, Gregory describes amulets as having power to fight the elements or protect the wearer from bandits.[199] Moreover, both sides employed dreams, herbs, healing letters, potions, poultices, and salves;[200] one can imagine the potions of Martin's dust, poultices of leaves and saliva of Saint Monegundis,[201] and the healing balm of holy oil. Even more, a letter from Saint Martin cured a girl of fever,[202] and Gregory himself acted upon instructions from a dream in order to cure his father of gout.[203]

Controlling the weather is something that would have been important to those living in the countryside, and a saint or relic which could wield such power would have been very appealing indeed. As suggested by Jones, Saint Martin's efforts to protect fields from hail

[197] Wallis, "Gregory of Tours' Nosebleed," 418.
[198] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 68.
[199] *VSM* 1.2, 4.32; *GM* 83.
[200] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 264.
[201] *VP,* 19.3; *GC*, 24.
[202] Sulpitius [sic] Severus, *Life of Saint Martin,* 19.
[203] *GC* 39.

storms likely resembled the actions of a *tempestarius*, or "weather magician."[204] Paulinus of Périgueux even appealed to the agricultural workers in the country in a miracle of crop-protecting wax from Martin's church.[205] Additionally, natural substances, either ingested or administered topically, are common among Gregory's miracles, which could indicate Christianized reframing of common "folk" medicinal treatments.[206]

The explanations of this overlap are far from resolved in the scholarship. Brown's theory on the Christianization of the countryside is based on the idea that pagan practices were about self-reliance, which were then substituted by dependence on the saint.[207] De Nie uses the sermons of Caesarius to argue that it was less about substitution or conversion then "depaganizing" the unconverted.[208] Flint proposes that what happened was not so much a substitution of spiritual figures or practices as "the levering into mesh of parallel, and potentially or actively competing, systems of communication with the supernatural."[209] She goes further, suggesting that this enmeshing was the result of "deliberately Christianized magical compromises" made by the church.[210] This implies a certain amount of skeptical intentionality that I do not fully agree with, and regardless, these hypothetical compromises were certainly not presented as a unified opinion within the ecclesiastical community. Caesarius' attitude in his sermons, offering contrast to Gregory's miracles, was much more stringent in his orthodoxy and fiercely condemned non-sanctioned Christian practices — even going so far as to say that using stones, trees, springs, amulets, or any magical practice was akin

[204] Jones, *Death and Afterlife*, 290-291; For original miracle Sulpitius [sic] Severus, *Dialogues*, 3.7.
[205] Ellis Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary," Book 6, 325.
[206] For full accounts and analysis, see chapter 4, page 60-61 of this thesis.
[207] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 118.
[208] Giselle De Nie, *Word, Image and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003418542. p 88.
[209] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 264.
[210] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 320.

to murder.[211] This alone indicates variability among the clergy, not just between bishops and unruly amulet-distributing clerics, but amongst the ecclesiastical upper echelon as well.

I believe that Flint's general theory that a lateral "enmeshing" of customs is more likely, but that rather than being a feat of social and religious engineering on part of the church,[212] I believe it occurred more naturally. In Gregory's community there were needs, and these needs were often met with a variety of methods and sources. Should one be stuck with paralysis, it is almost certain that all three of the different healers would be called. If there were any indication that pre-Christian rituals or a saint's ball of wax could protect one's field from hail, it is highly likely that both would be used. It is most likely that anything which could deliver results would be employed, in any combination, so long as it remained effective; even Gregory sought healing from both saint and physician. If one was benefited by wearing apotropaic amulets, then all the better that there should be options from both soothsayer and saint.

3.7 Accessing Saints' Healing: Behavioral vs. Medicinal

There are a variety of ways in which one could be granted a healing miracle by the saints. These can be imagined on a sliding scale between making oneself worthy through acts of penance (ie, praying, vigils, fasting, alms, etc) and mere possession of a holy substance taken from a saint's tomb — no performance needed.

3.7.1 Healing via Behavior

For healing purely as a result of behavior, performing certain necessary acts were required to make one worthy of healing. Cures following the correct behavior at the church or tomb of the saint could take anywhere from days to years. The more extreme types of penance

[211] Caesarius, *Sermons* 13.3.
[212] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 396.

needed to prepare the "patient" for healing were ascetic in nature: deprivation, praying without ceasing (sometimes for days), keeping vigils, abstinence, weeping, fasting, and other acts in order to make oneself deserving of forgiveness. Especially if one wanted to be cured of a punishment for wrongdoing, simply visiting the tomb or acquiring a bit of Martin's dust was not enough. After Gregory's aforementioned description of Martin as a health-giving "skilled physician" who can cure all that ails, he included the caveat that

> if the soul is humbled … prayer is raised to heaven, if tears flow down and true compunction follows, if sighs are emitted from the depths of the heart, and the guilty breast is beaten, weeping finds joy, guilt forgiveness, and the grieving heart achieves healing.[213]

Between penitential acts and the simple possession of holy medicine are variances of the two. These accounts are often less extreme and can include staying at the tomb overnight (instead of weeks, months, or years), praying, sometimes with descriptions of crying; very little ascetic (if any) acts were involved.

Sometimes there is a certain sense of negotiation in relation to tangible substances or objects procured at holy sites — for instance if a holy item is acquired by someone unworthy, or treated in an unworthy way (in these cases, they are treated more as relics than miraculous healing substances). An example of this is when one of Gregory's own men took a piece of wood from the railing of Saint Martin's, but neglected to honor it appropriately. As a consequence, this man and his entire family became sick, but recovered after returning it to Gregory.[214]

3.7.2 Healing via Holy Substances

[213] *VSM*, Book 3 Prologue.
[214] *VSM*, 1.35.

On the other side of the scale, there is no negotiation nor anything required of the user in order to be cured by holy oil, water, dust, or any other holy curative material. These holy substances were taken from the tombs of saints and used effectively without any element of penance or performance — the only small exception is sometimes making the sign of the cross over the afflicted area (especially in cases of holy oil, as was traditional in earlier western hagiographies). This is how tomb dust is most often presented: it could be consumed on-site, taken away, preserved in small boxes hung around the neck for protection, administered to others, or simply kept for oneself just in case of emergencies.

Situating Gregory's substance miracles in the rest of this chapter, it would appear that these substance cures were used very similarly to the medicines offered by both secular physicians as well as soothsayers. In the words of Valerie Flint, "Gregory of Tours administers tomb-dust in water rather as we do aspirin, and with a seemingly higher rate of success."[215] The spiritual efficacy of these substances, particularly the dust and the oil, are indisputable; no physician or soothsayer had a match for something with such consistent success. Essentially, as observed by Wallis, Saint Martin's tomb dust "did not replace medicine, but rather functioned exactly in accordance with how medicine should work."[216] While secular medicine did produce an effect, applying or ingesting sacred dust had the power of the saints to heal on a spiritual level, and therefore cure the physical ailment.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the medical options available in sixth century Gaul. Medical care was evidently something incredibly important to these communities, but its source(s) may have shifted according to an individual's place, beliefs, or customs. However, this is not to say

[215] Flint, "The Early Medieval 'Medicus'," 137.
[216] Wallis, "Gregory of Tours' Nosebleed," 418.

only certain people went to certain healers, and it is much more likely that sick people tried as many different cures from whoever they could in order to achieve healing. To assume that those living in Tours and surrounding areas held the same negative opinions of physicians and soothsayers as Gregory would be misguided; clearly, they were popular enough to compete with the superiority of saints' abilities. Gregory's awareness of humoral theory likely elevated doctors from antagonists to merely subpar healers and occasional allies against soothsayers, but also may have also informed his understanding of Christian miracles. Ultimately what made saints such effective healers was their ability to heal the soul, and therefore affect permanent healing to the body.

Gregory's healing miracles featuring holy substances both aligned and clashed with the logic of Christian spiritual healing. Holy substances or objects taken from the tombs of saints — most often in these cases, dust from the tomb of Saint Martin — and applied externally or taken internally did not require acts of penance or any ascetic behavior that would make the "patient" worthy of healing, as is the case with on-site healing miracles. Moreover, as discussed in a previous chapter, dust miracles were not found anywhere else in the medieval West before the fifth century select regions in Gaul. In essence, Gregory did not just elevate the cult of Saint Martin, but elevated this hyper-specific miracle substance present in other areas of Gaul as well. For his audience of both urban and rural communities, the practical value and flexibility of these holy materials would have been almost a new kind of medicine, one that is so imbued with the power of the saint that it can cure whatever and whoever is in need of healing, regardless of if they are deserving.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Throughout this research I have composed a spreadsheet of healing miracle substances in Gregory's hagiographies and histories.[217] These numbers are gathered according to the number of individuals benefiting in each miracle story, as well as the number of curative materials. Therefore, rather than a cut and dry data set based only on the numbers of Gregory's accounts, this information includes their dimensions. For example, in the Life of Martin chapter 3.60, the dust of Martin's tomb heals Gregory, Bishop Avitus, two of Gregory's servants, and one of Gregory's scribes. As such, this singular miracle account has five separate entries. Similarly, chapter ten in *Glory of the Confessors* presents two curative substances — one is candle wax, and the other is water which soaked a cluster of grapes from a vine Martin planted. As a result, this account contains information for two entries. If the same material is used in two different ways, which is not especially common, then it will be explained in the analysis. In this way, I have been able to gather data on who was benefiting from these miracles, where they occurred, which saint was involved, what materials were used, the means of application, and the associated afflictions.[218]

4.2 Composition and Expected Health Benefits of Marble Dust

A big issue here is that it is impossible to know exactly what this tomb dust consisted of. It could have been from the saint's sarcophagus or the enclosure of the tomb, and to obscure

[217] For the full spreadsheet, see Appendix.
[218] I must also acknowledge the work of Edward James in his article "Materiality and the Holy in Gregory of Tours." Although my numbers differ slightly from his, he provides broader data sets which are beyond this research.

things further, it could have been scratched from the tomb itself or collected from where it had naturally settled. However, what can be safely assumed is that the sarcophagus lid was made of marble. Gregory states that Eufronius (Bishop of Autun, fl. c. 470) sent a marble lid to cover Martin's sarcophagus which had recently been translated to the new basilica constructed by Perpetuus in the mid 460s-473. Its reception would have been approximately the same time that he would have commissioned Paulinus of Périgueux to write his versified *Vita Martini*, which describes Perpetuus quickly scraping "dust from the blessed marble" (*abrasus propere benedicto e marmore pulvis*).[219] After the new basilica's construction, Perpetuus is said to have removed the old chapel dedicated to Saint Martin, but saved the "elegantly designed" vault to use in his construction of a smaller church for Apostles Peter and Paul.[220] Because of the grandeur and ceremony of completing a new basilica, it is unlikely that any portion of the old sarcophagus, even the old marble, would have been saved, as it would have distracted from the glory and sanctity of the new sarcophagus.[221] Therefore, regardless of what the old lid was made of, it can be assumed that Martin's sarcophagus lid was indeed marble at the time of Gregory's writings.

Marble's mineralogical composition is "38-42 percent lime (CaO), 20-25 percent silica (SiO2), 2-4 percent alumina (Al2O3), and 1.5-2.5 percent oxides (NaO and MgO), and 30-32 percent water (MgCO3 and others)."[222] On their own, these compounds vary from dangerous to neutral: Lime (CaO) is extremely toxic; aluminum oxide (Al2O3) does not provoke an "acute toxic response" but long term exposure can lead to health issues; silica (Al2O3) is dangerous if

[219] *Historiae*, 2.15; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 567; Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary," translation p. 13 line 305.
[220] *Historiae*, 2.14.
[221] This can be contrasted to the preservation of Saint Felix's old sarcophagus lid, which became the source of miracles including dust cures: *GC*, 100.
[222] Wikipedia contributors, "Marble," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Marble&oldid=1223722367.

inhaled and results in abdominal discomfort if swallowed; and sodium and magnesium oxides (NaO and MgO) in small amounts are safe for humans, and even used in supplements.

The chemical composition is more interesting: marble is made predominantly of calcium carbonate (CaCO3), which also happens to be the primary component of antacids.[223] Although I have not yet experimented with marble dust potions to soothe a sour stomach, it is likely that the amount of dust scraped from the tomb would not have been enough to affect the serious afflictions like the fevers and dysentery associated with this cure. Topical cures — for instance, rubbing dust-infused holy oil upon boils or blisters — may have been somewhat effective according to the skin-soothing benefits of olive oil, but the beneficial results cannot be attributed to the holy marble dust. Moreover, some of the more miraculous cures of healing the blind, mute, deaf, paralyzed, or possessed would have been entirely faith-based. One may hope, however, that there might be a grain of truth — a dust particle, if you will — underneath Gregory's exaggerations.

4.3 Prosopography: Beneficiaries in Gregory's Miracle Accounts

My results regarding the demographics of who was healed in Gregory's miracle accounts yield what many scholars have already observed: Gregory did not limit his miracles to any certain group, but included anyone who sought healing. Men, women, children, aristocrats, royal servants, peasants, farmers, individuals from Gregory's own household, and of course, Gregory himself, all had access to the spiritual healing of the saints. According to Sharon Farmer, more than half of the beneficiaries of Martin's healing in general were locals or lived in nearby towns,[224] and the poor and enslaved were given the hope that they might be

[223] Ibid.
[224] Sharon Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours.* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 271.

delivered by the saints' powers of restoration.[225] In terms of upper-class individuals, Gregory included royal servants, the wife of a count, and a future court official under Childebert (although he did not hold this position at the time). Named beneficiaries were most often other ecclesiastical figures or had some kind of direct connection to Gregory himself. For the rest of the unnamed, there are four women, 12 men, and 38 general beneficiaries in the plural (most often referred to as "ill people").

However, while Gregory was inclusive of his community in his miracle accounts, Saint Martin's healing power was almost entirely limited to royal servants, ecclesiastical figures and their servants, and people directly connected to Gregory himself (either servants of his household, clerics, family members, or parishioners). It is very likely that due to the popularity of Martin's cult Gregory had to limit direct access to the tomb, and only those with similar ecclesiastical authority or personal relationships with Gregory were able to benefit from Martin's healing medicines. This restriction apparently extended even to the clergy: the single account of healing dirt is from a miracle story in which Gregory's own priest Leo, in search of healing dust, could not get into Saint Martin's church. In his desperation, he prayed outside the apse where the tomb was located, and collected the earth from the outside (which successfully healed his sick maidservant).[226]

4.4 Substances and Afflictions

4.4.1 Dust, Oil, and Water

Of the 99 cases of healing substance miracles in Gregory's work, tomb dust alone makes up 38%, followed by holy oil at 19% and water at 13%. The rest are an assortment ranging from the sanctified objects like candles, wax, and cloth to natural materials such as leaves, herbs,

[225] Kitchen, "Gregory of Tours, Hagiography, and the Cult of the Saints," 402.
[226] *VSM*, 4.25.

moss, flowers, or fruit found near other holy places or unknown saints' tombs in more rural areas. Of the 38 total dust miracles in Gregory's writings, Martin's dust alone performs 23 of them, making up a stunning 60%. While a reader of his histories and hagiographies would notice the prevalence of this unique miracle, the numbers above communicate just how much Gregory emphasized it.

Oil's second place status is unusual compared to the priority it claimed in other hagiographies and ecclesiastical writings (for instance, the work of Paulinus of Nola and Caesarius of Arles, and even the other Lives of Martin), indicating that by the sixth century this was something of a standard miracle substance.[227] Interestingly, even though olive oil is far more digestible than dust mixed with water, only two oil miracles involve ingestion — the curing of a deaf and mute man who received both topical and ingested treatment, and a separate miracle in which holy oil saved a mortally sick woman whose condition had been worsened by a soothsayer. Besides these, external application makes up 84% of all oil miracles in Gregory's work. As mentioned, olive oil's soothing properties were probably effective for skin conditions, but only four of these miracles involve infection or sores. Otherwise, the most common cure is of possession (26%), and the rest a variety of ailments with no distinct pattern.

Healing water as presented by Gregory is six out of twelve times made miraculous by its contact with a holy object or person, either used to wash a tomb, cloth, a miraculous gemstone, and so on. 90% of the time this cure was ingested, and often resolved fevers — an example of application according to affliction (water to put out the fire, so to speak).[228] Otherwise the cures are once again a variety with no distinct pattern. It is also interesting to

[227] For those wondering about what kind of oil was being used, Paulinus confirms that it was indeed olive oil in Book 6, both line 177 and 294 (*olivi* in both cases). Mount, "A Literary and Religious-Historical Commentary," translation pp. 8, 13.
[228] *VSJ* 25; *GM* 5, 101.

note that roughly half the time holy water is not found in churches or tombs, but at other natural sources like hot springs or wells.[229]

4.4.2 Edible Material

There is a semi-consistent logic to cures being either ingested or applied topically according to the medical or spiritual issue. Quenching fevers with holy water is a good example, and in fact, all ingestion miracles address some kind of internal malady (with the exception of boils or a toothache). Pouring oil into the mouth of mute individuals occurs twice, and all nine cases of dysentery are treated with tomb dust and water.[230] This logic is less consistent with topical remedies, but overall the application of the medicine appears to be consistent with the affliction.

There are 13 accounts of natural material used for healing, consisting of leaves (laurel, mulberry, and unspecified), sage, roses, pears, tree bark, moss, and general "herbs." Ten out of these 13 are ingested (77%), excluding the moss and two poultices of leaves which were applied to sores. However, it may be noted that all of these things are hypothetically edible, or their derivatives have potential as ingested medicines. Mulberry and laurel,[231] for example, both have verified medicinal uses: mulberry has broad applications in Chinese medicine, and current research has revealed that its leaves, twigs, roots, and the fruit have been found to both prevent and treat diabetes.[232] Laurel leaves — also known as bay leaves — are noted for their use in "traditional or folk medicines" which were predominantly used to treat gastrointestinal upset.[233]

[229] For example, the healing springs found in: *VSJ*, 3, 25, 26.
[230] Sulpicius Severus, "Church Fathers: Dialogues," 3.2; *Historiae,* 6.6.
[231] *GM*, 67, 77; *GC*, 7.
[232] Chen-Hao Liu, Fei Liu, and Liang Xiong. "Medicinal Parts of Mulberry (Leaf, Twig, Root Bark, and Fruit) and Compounds Thereof Are Excellent Traditional Chinese Medicines and Foods for Diabetes Mellitus." *Journal of Functional Foods* 106 (July 1, 2023), 105619. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jff.2023.105619.
[233] Keith Singletary, "Bay Leaf: Potential Health Benefits." *Nutrition Today* 56, no. 4 (July 2021), 202—8. https://doi.org/10.1097/NT.0000000000000493.

These traditional uses may be confirmed by a recent study finding that laurel leaves have a positive effect on "intestinal microbiota and their metabolic activity" in rats.[234]

However, Gregory ascribes the healing abilities of these trees to a more sacred source. In one instance, in a village in Tours, an unspecified tree gained its miraculous properties after Martin "raised" it after falling during a storm, which afterwards produced medicinal bark that could be dissolved in water and then drunk.[235] Another account describes a mulberry tree growing in Arles where the late third century martyr Genesius was beheaded, which over time had withered due to so many people breaking off branches and bark to be used as medicine.[236] The last is a laurel tree that grew from the tomb of fourth century Saint Baudilius, which similarly withered due to overuse in healing remedies.

4.4.3 Inedible Material

Besides tomb dust, there are 15 inedible miracle-working materials including clay or earthen tokens, dirt, candles or candle wick, cloth, rope, wood, or burned fish heart and liver. Thankfully, only three of these are ingested (candle wick, candle, and dirt). Seven are applied topically; two could be described as magical cures (both from the instructions from Gregory's dreams as a child);[237] and the applications of three are not specified.

By far, the most commonly ingested material out of all of them is tomb dust: it makes up over half of all ingested substances, and among dust miracles is ingested 84% of the time.

[234] Marija Berendika, et al. "Beneficial Effects of Laurel (Laurus Nobilis L.) and Myrtle (Myrtus Communis L.) Extract on Rat Health." *Molecules (Basel, Switzerland)* 27, no. 2 (January 17, 2022), 581. https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules27020581.
[235] Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 7: "But even though it is dead because it has been stripped of its bark," "Many people have faithfully scraped at its bark, and after they have taken and dissolved the bark in water, soon they received a medicine."
[236] *GM*, 67: "with the passage of time, after many people had broken off its branches and bark for healing purposes, it withered."; *GM*, 77: "Since the tree had been repeatedly stripped of its leaves and some of its bark to obtain the benefits of its powers, it had become withered."
[237] *GC* 39.

This cure is most commonly associated with fevers (solving roughly half of all fever cases) and dysentery, which is exclusively cured by dust. As it is often mixed with water, one might wonder if it was the dust itself curing the patient on a spiritual level, or if the dust imbued the water with sanctified healing power. [238] But Gregory places his emphasis on the dust itself, sometimes forgoing any description of what the dust was mixed with and stating only that it was drunk (and even then, sometimes only swallowed).

4.5 Perforated Tombs

Although this dust is specifically from the tombs of saints, it is not always clear how it was taken. There are only two examples of dust which had been taken from "around the tomb" and not the tomb itself, opposed to seven accounts where the words "scratch" or "scrape" are used to gather the dust from the tomb.[239] Moreover, although the specific language describing the action is not used, Gregory also describes holes or perforations of certain tombs, indicating the long-term effects of this practice. However, only once is the action of "scrape" used in a miracle of Saint Martin, and at no point is his tomb ever described as exhibiting evidence of common use.[240] Therefore, looking elsewhere for evidence of human interaction with saints' tombs will yield better information about the popularity of this practice.

There are a total of 16 miracles from Gregory describing holy dust from tombs outside his diocese. Three are from the tombs of Jesus, Andrew the Apostle, and John the Evangelist, which rhetorically couches this unusual miracle in the biblical world — similar to the beginning of his *Histories* — and as such will not be included in the following analysis. The remaining 13 are all from Gaul, with locations in Autun (1), Bourges (1), Brioude (2 — both Julian),

[238] There are two cases in which dust is also mixed with wine: *VSM*, 2.51, 3.12. However, I do not believe that the presence of wine would have aided the afflictions (dysentery and fever/vomiting), so in these cases the remedy would have been only tomb dust rather than any benefit from water.
[239] For dust from "around the tomb," see *VSJ* 24, 45. For "scratch" and "scrape" see *VSM*, 1.37, *GC*, 35, 52, 63, 103, 100; *GM*, 49.
[240] *VSM*, 1.37.

Clermont (1), Cologne (1), Lyons (5 — three from his great uncle Nicetius, and two from saint Epipodius), Mainz (1), and Paris (1). Nine of these are ingested miracles, only one is explicitly topical, and three are not specified.

For proof of use, Gregory documents at least three separate tombs and one wall in Gaul which exhibit evidence of scraping or scratching by the faithful in order to obtain healing medicine. These four cases call for analysis. The sanctified wall is from a fifth century saint named Lupicinus located in Lipidiacum (now associated with Trézelles),[241] whose acts of extreme self-mortification resulted in blood and spit coughed onto the walls of his cell. According to Gregory, the wall is described as having "as many little holes as it had merited drops of spittle from the mouth of the blessed man" due to so many people coming to collect this healing relic.[242]

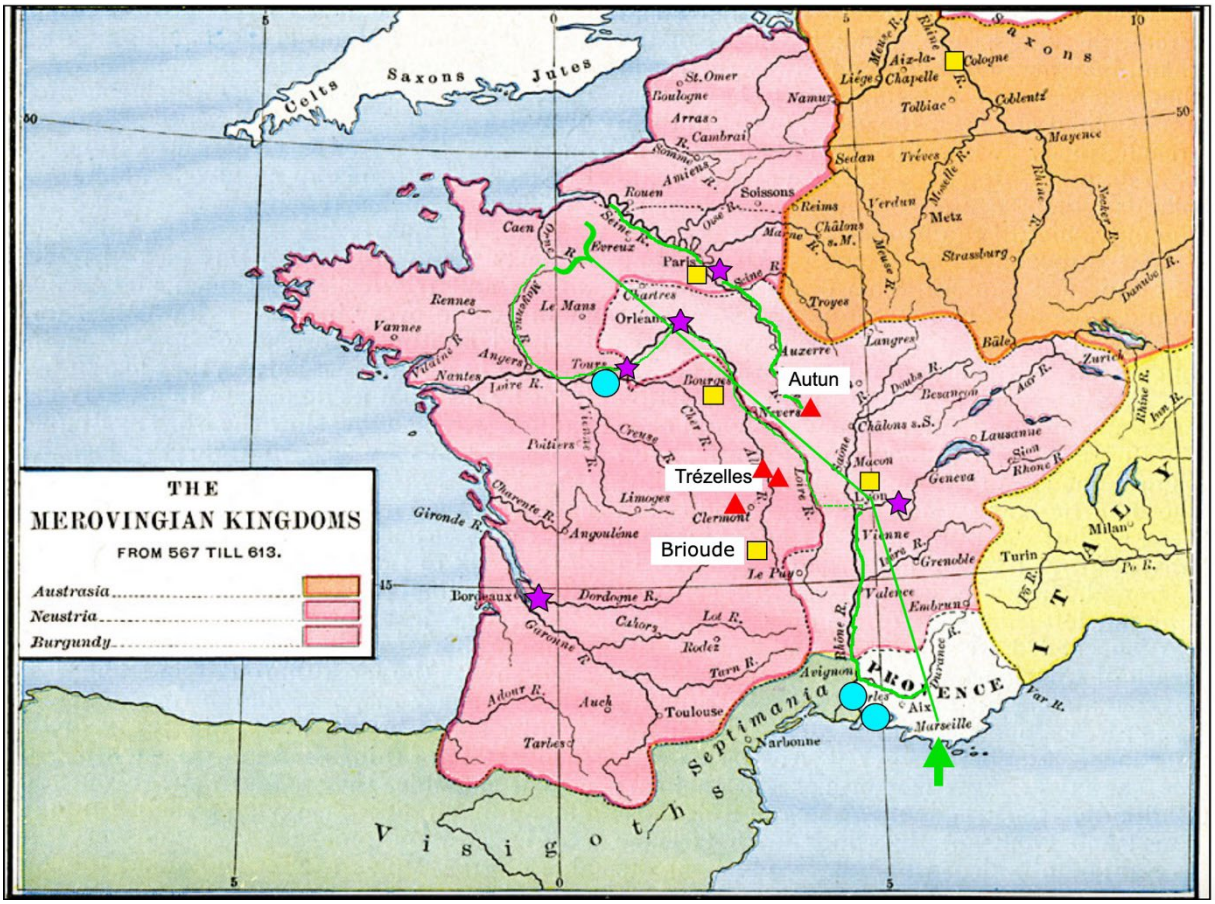
The next two are both bishops: fourth century Cassianus of Autun, and fifth century Theomastus of Mainz. Theomastus offers dust from his tomb which can be ingested to relieve toothaches and fevers to great effect, a "blessing sought so constantly that already the sarcophagus appears to have been perforated in one spot."[243] The affliction cured by Cassianus' remedy is not specified, but his tomb too had been "scratched by many ill people and was thought at that time to have been almost perforated."[244] The last case is the fifth century monk Alexander of Clermont, whose healing dust was also ingested for unspecific illnesses, but "has been sought so often that [the tomb] seems to spectators to have been perforated because of the constant profit of these benefits."[245]

[241] *VP,* 13.3 In this account, a dispute over where Lupicinus should be buried breaks out between the peasants of Lipicadium and a woman from Trézelles. In the end, the woman called for help, "had the body placed on a bier and carried to the village of Trézelle." One can infer that it was within a day's walking distance.
[242] *VP,* 13.2. No afflictions are specified.
[243] Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 52.
[244] Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 73.
[245] Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 35.

Clearly at the time of Gregory's writings these tombs had been used for cures for at least decades, if not longer. However, even though the saints themselves were mostly from the fourth and fifth centuries, there is unfortunately no way to know when the churches or tombs were established (with the exception of Lupicinus, who lived in his cell). In contrast to Saint Martin's tomb, which was likely regulated due to the amount of incoming pilgrims, these four cases are more accessible: both Alexander and Theomastus were placed in the courtyards of churches,[246] Cassianus' tomb was in a cemetery, and Lupicinus was described as enclosing himself in "old walls," indicating that his cell was remote or abandoned. There would have been nothing preventing local health-seeking individuals from taking what they needed from these sites, resulting in visible marks or perforations.

[246] Theomastus buried in the forecourt of Hilary church (Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 52); Alexander buried in the courtyard of the church of Saint Venerandus (Gregory Bishop of Tours *Glory of the Confessors*, 35).

4.6 Geography



Perforated Tomb (healing dust; evidence of use)

Normal Tomb (healing dust)

Hypothetical trade routes from the East (as the crow flies; river travel)

Trees (healing bark; evidence of use)

Evidence of Syrian presence (*I am assuming that Gregory's translator Johannes helped him in Tours; *Lyons evidence provided by Momigliano [1982])

Fig. 2 Map of Merovingian Francia with locations of miracle sites, trade routes, and easterners.[247]

In an effort to find connections between hypothetical trade routes, dust-giving tombs, and eastern influences, I have created a map based on the limited data available to me (See

[247] Robert H. Labberton, *New Historical Atlas and General History* (New York, NY: Townsend MacCoun, 1886), Plate XXIII, found at https://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/6800/6839/6839.htm.

fig.2). Although the scarce information makes connections challenging, one can see at a glance that besides the outliers of Arles and Cologne, all of this data is more or less from central Gaul.

Given that Gregory grew up in the Auvergne region, it makes sense that a large part of these miracle tombs would be in familiar places. But the relationship goes both ways: just as our understanding of saints' dust-giving tombs in central Gaul is informed by Gregory's world, so was his world informed by the saints he was exposed to in his life. The cluster of perforated tombs in Clermont, Trézelles, and Autun in the region of his upbringing would have shaped his already ecclesiastically charged worldview; he even states that he himself had "seen many who had scraped from the wall" of Lupicinus (although he does not specify when). Importantly, both accounts of Alexander and Theomastus indicate that this medicine was ingested. One might also remember the story from when Gregory was only a deacon instructing his sick servant to drink a mixture of water and dust from the tomb of Julian, long before becoming bishop.[248]

Regarding the hypothetical trade routes and Syrian settlements — again, based on very limited data — one can imagine that an influx of easterners as a result of increased trade would be pulled towards bigger cities as a source of commerce. One must also keep in mind that Gregory would have been writing decades after the initial spike in trade, leaving time for Syrians to settle in areas not directly connected to trade routes or commerce (notably, there is no indication in Gregory's work of a Syrian concentration along the coast). If trade from the East took the river route from Marseilles to Lyons and up to Normandy, it would have likely brought merchants through Lyons, Bourges, Orleans, and Tours, three of which have evidence of Syrian residents. However, the only cities where both Syrians and dust-giving saints' tombs are found are Paris, Lyons, and Tours, and none of the locations of perforated tombs indicate Syrian presence at all. As such, I do not feel that there is a strong connection between Syrians

[248] *VSJ* 45.

and these tomb sites — least of all perforated tombs — to justify a correlation. However, it is still likely that an existing Syrian presence would have had an effect on local culture and customs, not to mention the pilgrims returning from the east bringing home ampullae or tokens.

4.7 Conclusion

This thesis has explored three potential avenues to explain Gregory's fixation on tomb dust: the potential of Syrian influence in Gaul, the notion of pre-Christian cultural survivals, and the possibility of an organic tradition emerging from the fourth and fifth centuries when the Christian world was undergoing shifts in regards to holy relics. The key findings of this section address the existence and practice of ingesting sacred tomb dust from before Gregory's time, and indicate that its use was likely a long-standing tradition in (at least) central Gaul.

The evidence towards a long-term practice of ingestion is less solid, however; Gregory never mentions his parents or uncles eating or drinking anything miraculous, despite their physical ailments. In addition, the first account of the dust recorded by Paulinus only acknowledges that the mixture could "increase health," but with no description of how this might be achieved. Gregory's accounts of ingested dust from Alexander and Theomastus' perforated tombs are from his *Confessors* hagiographies, written at least eight years into his episcopacy at which point ingestion may have become his default means of application for tomb dust. This leads to a fourth possibility that the ingestion element was an invention of Gregory, possibly inspired by humoral theory or from Syrian acquaintances, but beside the act of ingesting the medicine, there is nothing to indicate any association with humoral treatment.[249] Moreover, it is already in the first book of Life of Martin that Gregory describes healing

[249] It is very unlikely that Gregory would have considered tomb dust to be a way to balance the humors. For example, humoral theory states that fevers were a result of imbalanced humors, and rather than water (holy or otherwise), was treated with a semi-starvation diet consisting of gruel, honey, or vinegar. See Leonard G. Wilson, "Fevers." in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine,* Vol. 1&2. eds. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter. (London; New York: Routledge, 1993): 390-393.

ingested dust miracles, which he would have written during the early years of his episcopacy (likely before he had the occasion to work with any Syrian translators on eastern miracles). And more, there is no indication that he engaged with any kind of Syrian presence in the Auvergne, in contrast to the cluster of perforated tombs in this region. In this case, I believe that we can take Gregory's word that the dust from these tombs was indeed used for the purpose of ingested medicine.

As for the rest of the holy ingested material, I have a separate argument. The presence of natural healing substances which happen to be associated with saints is quite a coincidence — one that very likely indicates pre-existing medicinal practices. This is especially true for the laurel and mulberry trees which exhibit signs of common use to the point that the trees had withered by the time of Gregory's account. I would argue even further that what may have been considered "pagan" in the Christian world could have easily been repackaged in the form of saintly medicine. A rare example of a living saint, Monegundis (who established a monastery in Tours near Saint Martin's church), features two accounts of healing involving leaves.[250] In both accounts, she used leaves mixed with her saliva to create a poultice, over which she made the sign of the cross before applying to the afflicted area. Were it not for the sign of the cross, as noted by Flint, "such a process would have been hard to distinguish from the binding on of an herbal cure by a wise woman."[251] This falls in line with the overlap of medicine between saints and soothsayers as discussed in the previous chapter, including weather miracles, and would not be unusual to consider that these miraculous natural cures are actually Christianized versions of much older practices.

In sum, this analysis has offered insight into the specifics of ingesting holy substances described by Gregory, revealing strong evidence that collecting and ingesting tomb dust may

[250] *VP,* 19.3; *GC*, 24.
[251] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 303.

have been a relatively familiar practice in central Gaul. This practice likely began during the fourth and fifth centuries during the evolution of relics and their uses. I also argue that much of the natural holy medicine found in Gregory's works is likely connected to pre-Christian community medical practices. As of now, I can find no direct correlation between Syrian presence in Gaul and the locations of holy dust. However, because Gregory in many ways was reflecting his culture as well as shaping it, it is possible that all of these influences collected together to form a specific local practice in Gaul.

Conclusion

Although a variety of holy healing substances has been included in this thesis, my question has always returned to tomb dust. Drinking holy wine, water, or even oil were all familiar Christian practices by the time of Gregory's writing, and pleasantly, are all digestible substances. In comparison, the ingestion of tomb dust is distinctly perplexing.

Seeking out an explanation for this unique miracle demanded investigation into the backgrounds of Gregory of Tours, which delivered evidence that he was not a man in need of self-promotion: he, his family, and his diocese were all already quite powerful. As a result, he appears to have acted upon apparently selfless motivations as a result of genuine faith and care for his community. I have also delivered details on possible external influences: one is the writings of previous church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries who specifically mention the dust of saints, all of which would have been familiar to Gregory. However, these writings neither focus on tombs nor do they mention healing benefits. Another is the potential Syrian presence in Gaul: as Syria was the only other place between the fourth and sixth centuries which featured any kind of healing dust, and because of Gregory's explicit descriptions of Syrians in Gaul as well as clergy returning from pilgrimage in the East, it is not unlikely that there was a connection between the two.

Understanding how this miracle worked has been addressed by considering saints' miracles in the context of healing options in sixth century Gaul. Gregory presents a stark contrast in healing mechanisms between physician, soothsayer, and saint: the physician could only treat physical ailments, the soothsayer presented a danger to the patient's spiritual (and consequently physical) health, but the saint was superior to all due to the curative power of not just the soul, but the body as well. It becomes clear that in Gregory's mind that the soul and the

body are inextricably connected — one must maintain a clear conscience and a clean soul in order to preserve health.

But it didn't always work that way. The substances which this thesis addresses were just as often used without any requirements of penance or acts of service to the church, unlike the healing miracles experienced at the tombs. Instead, these holy materials behaved as one might expect of a physician's remedy. In this way, they almost seemed to have become divorced from traditional relics, despite that their healing power was made possible by contact with the saint or other holy objects. Instead, they became substances one could collect and take away to consume, preserve, administer to someone else, or even keep in a small box word around the neck for protection. Even the fact that they are digested aligns them more closely with secular medicine than holy healing.

Inquiring into who was benefiting from these miracles did not yield any new information; scholars already widely agree that Gregory's miracle accounts included everyone from high to low society, urban and rural, made and female, and even adults and children. What became more important was moving beyond Tours to see when and where else this practice occurred in the rest of Gaul. Placing Syrian individuals or communities on the map according to Gregory's accounts apparently does not correspond with the locations of dust-giving tombs, making it difficult to draw a direct correlation. However, what became clear was the concentration of perforated tombs in the Auvergne region, where Gregory grew up. The perforated nature of these tombs indicate that this had likely been a practice for at least decades, if not a century. Furthermore, the saints of these tombs were all from the fourth and fifth centuries. While there is no information on when their tombs were established, the timing and evidence point to long-term use in central Gaul beginning during a period in which the treatment of relics was shifting in the Christian world, coupled with the beginnings of increased trade between Gaul and Syria. These two things combined — flexibility in the functions of relics in

the Christian world and an increased presence of Syrians in the fifth century could have indirectly constructed a practice of consuming holy substances in a similar way as the stylites with the western preference of dead holy men.

This combined data indicates that this practice had been in place long before Gregory had taken up his bishopric, likely beginning in the fifth century before the first dust miracle presented by Paulinus. Moreover, this is a practice that, if the cluster of perforated tombs in his home territory is any indication, was familiar to him. For Gregory, it is very likely that drinking dust was not unusual at all, but a familiar remedy he wanted to share.

Appendix

For access to the full Excel spreadsheet, please visit the following link hosted by CEU:

https://tinyurl.com/bdcvhntw

Alternately, see the same file hosted on Mega:

https://tinyurl.com/4x57fsc8

For anyone unable to access this spreadsheet for any reason, please contact the program coordinator for Historical Studies at CEU, or feel free to write me at my personal email at lbaker0912@gmail.com and I would be delighted to share it with you.

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