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Why Did the Mission to the Anglo-Saxons Stall in 596: Anxiety, Politics or Money?

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This paper explores the crisis of 596 which interrupted Augustine of Canterbury's mission to the Anglo-Saxons, necessitating his return to Rome. Bede's interpretation of this as a moment of psychological failure is discounted. Political changes in Merovingian Gaul associated with the death of Childebert are reconsidered. A new economic explanation is advanced based on the wording of Gregory the Great's letter of encouragement to Augustine and his fellow missionaries, consideration of the management of the papal estates in Gaul and the behaviour of Virgilius, metropolitan of Arles.

On, or just after, 23 July 596 Augustine of Canterbury set out from Rome at the instigation of Pope Gregory the Great to evangelise the pagan peoples of Britain. This was, though, his second departure, for just a month or so earlier he had already begun his journey only for the mission to stall in southern France and for him to return to Rome. Historically, two interpretations have been offered for this missional pause. The earliest, proposed by Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica*,

CCSL = Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina; *HE* = Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, revised edn, Oxford 1991; MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historia; *PCBE* = L. Pietri and M. Heijmans (eds), *Prosopographie chrétienne du bas-empire*, IV: *Prosopographie de la Gaule chrétienne (314–614)*, Paris 2013; *PLRE* = A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale and J. Morris (eds), *The prosopography of the later Roman Empire*, Cambridge 1971–92; *Registrum* = Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum: libri I–VII*, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL cxl, cxlA, Turnhout 1982; *SC* = *Sources Chrétiennes*

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emphasised psychology: fear among Augustine's party of monks about their future engagement with the barbarian English caused him to be sent back to Rome to request they be absolved of their responsibility. A modern interpretation has focused on politics: Augustine's discovery of the death of the Merovingian king Childebert II necessitated his return to Rome to rethink the organisation of the mission. In this article, I will challenge Bede's psychological interpretation, showing how it is based on a misunderstanding of a letter of Pope Gregory to Augustine's fellow monks. I will also reassess the political interpretation, suggesting that though it remains plausible the evidence for it is weak. In their place, I shall offer a new economic interpretation for Augustine's return to Rome. This will focus on the relationship between Pope Gregory's designated rector of the papal estates in southern Gaul, Candidus, and the bishop of Arles, Virgilius. I shall propose that Gregory had planned for the Kentish mission to be funded by revenue from the Gallic papal estates that had accumulated under a former rector, one of Virgilius' episcopal predecessors at Arles, Sapaudus. Virgilius' refusal to turn over this money to Candidus, discovered by Augustine only after he had arrived in Provence, necessitated his return to Rome to take advice from Pope Gregory and to receive revised letters robustly requiring Virgilius' compliance.

In recounting the earliest stage of Pope Gregory the Great's mission to the Anglo-Saxons, Bede relates the first of two antiheroic stories about the leader of the mission, the Italian monk Augustine. Augustine was from Gregory's monastic foundation of St Andrew in Rome and was sent in 596 with a team of fellow monks to preach to the English people. Soon after their departure, however, Bede records that the monks

> were paralysed by terror. They began to contemplate returning home rather than going to a barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation whose language they did not even understand. They all agreed that this was the safer course; so forthwith they sent home Augustine whom Gregory had intended to have consecrated as their bishop if they were received by the English. Augustine was to beg St Gregory humbly for permission to give up so dangerous, wearisome, and uncertain a journey.[1]

Gregory's response was to send Augustine back to the monks with an encouraging letter, dated 23 July 596, the text of which Bede reproduces:

[1] 'perculsi timore inerti redire domum potius quam barbaram feram incredulamque gentem, cuius ne linguam quidem nossent, adire cogitabant, et hoc esse tutius communi consilio decernebant. Nec mora, Augustinum, quem eis episcopum ordinandum, si ab Anglis susciperentur, disposuerat, domum remittunt, qui a beato Gregorio humili supplicatu obtineret, ne tam periculosam, tam laboriosam, tam incertam peregrinationem adire deberent': *HE* i.23, pp. 68–9.

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Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to the servants of our Lord.

My dearly beloved sons, it would have been better not to have undertaken a noble task than to turn back deliberately from what you have begun: so it is right that you should carry out with all diligence this good work which you have begun with the help of the Lord. Therefore do not let the toil of the journey nor the tongues of evil speakers deter you. But carry out the task you have begun under the guidance of God with all constancy and fervour. Be sure that, however great your task may be, the glory of your eternal reward will be still greater. When Augustine your prior returns, now, by our appointment, your abbot, humbly obey him in all things, knowing that whatever you do under his direction will be in all respects profitable to your souls. May Almighty God protect you by His grace and grant that I may see the fruit of your labours in our heavenly home. Though I cannot labour with you, yet because I should have been glad indeed to do so, I hope to share in the joy of your reward. May God keep you safe, my dearly loved sons.[2]

The psychological interpretation: anxiety about the destination

Such is the power of Bede's skill as a narrator that a psychological interpretation of the episode has until recently largely been taken for granted. In a volume containing the proceedings of a conference held to mark the fourteen-hundredth anniversary of Augustine's mission, for example, Richard Gameson ascribes the episode to 'cold feet' in the face of 'concern about the barbarous nature of the English'.[3] Bolstering the psychological interpretation of this episode are various misleading translations of phrases in Gregory's letter to the monks in the Colgrave and Mynors edition of Bede's *Historia* and in the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition. First, the expression 'tongues of evil speakers' has misled some to think Gregory was writing about the opinions of local Gallic nay-sayers warning against

[2] 'Gregorius seruus seruorum Dei seruis Domini nostri. Quia melius fuerat bona non incipere quam ab his, quae coepta sunt, cogitatione retrorsum redire, summo studio, dilectissimi filii, oportet ut opus bonum, quod auxiliante Domino coepistis, impleatis. Nec labor uos ergo itineris nec maledicorum hominum linguae deterreant, sed omni instantia omnique feruore, quae inchoastis, Deo auctore peragite, scientes quod laborem magnum maior aeternae retributionis gloria sequitur. Remeanti autem Augustino praeposito uestro, quem et abbatem uobis constituimus, in omnibus humiliter oboedite, scientes hoc uestris animabus per omnia profuturum, quicquid a uobis fuerit in eius admonitione conpletum. Omnipotens Deus sua uos gratia protegat, et uestri laboris fructum in aeterna me patria uidere concedat, quatinus etsi uobiscum laborare nequeo, simul in gaudio retributionis inueniar, quia laborare scilicet uolo. Deus uos incolumes custodiat, dilectissimi filii': *HE* i.23, pp. 70–1; *Registrum* vi.53. I omit the final dating clause.

[3] R. Gameson, 'Augustine of Canterbury: context and achievement', in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the conversion of England*, Stroud 1999, 1–40 at p. 9.

the folly of the expedition.[4] The *Sources Chrétiennes* edition, similarly, translates the phrase as 'la langue des hommes médisants', explaining in a footnote 'ces médisants sont les colporteurs de rumeurs terrifiantes sur les peuples de Grande-Bretagne'.[5] The more accurate rendering, however, is 'tongues of wicked men' ('maledicorum hominum linguae'), a phrase whose significance I shall explore later but which is not convincingly interpreted as scare-mongers. Second, Colgrave's translation has led many to think that Augustine had returned to Gaul having recently been promoted from prior ('praepositus') to abbot ('abbas'), the implication being that he had been granted extra authority over his nervous colleagues: 'when Augustine your prior returns, *now, by our appointment, your abbot*, humbly obey him in all things'.[6] However, as Roger Collins and Judith McClure have pointed out, there is no 'now' ('nunc') in Gregory's Latin.[7] Moreover, Colgrave's translation 'by our appointment' obscures Gregory's indicative verb 'constituimus' which is either in the present or the perfect tense. Thus, though Gregory may have been writing about a very recent promotion, he could instead have been referring to the appointment of Augustine as abbot on the group's original departure. As an instructive contrast to Colgrave's translation, we might note that of John R. C. Martyn: 'but when your leader, whom we have also appointed as your abbot, returns to you, obey him in all things'.[8] Gregory's letter might not, therefore, provide such a sure buttress to Bede's psychological interpretation that Augustine and his fellow monks were terrified of the English.

The view that we should be more sceptical about Bede's interpretation gains ground when we consider his methodology as an historian. In a systematic examination of Bede's sources for the Gregorian mission,

[4] 'some critical locals, it seems': *The letters of Gregory the Great: translated, with introduction and notes*, ed. and trans. J. R. C. Martyn, Toronto 2004, 68.

[5] *Bède le Vénérable, Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple Anglais*, ed. M. Lapidge, trans. P. Monat and P. Robin, *SC* cdlxxxix–cdxc, Paris 2005, i.194–5.

[6] 'remeanti autem Augustino praeposito uestro, quem et abbatem uobis constituimus, in omnibus humiliter oboedite': *HE* i.23, pp 70–1.

[7] R. Collins and J. McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow: three viewpoints on Augustine's mission', in S. Barton and P. A. Linehan (eds), *Cross, crescent and conversion: studies on medieval Spain and Christendom in memory of Richard Fletcher*, Leiden 2007, 17–42 at p. 27.

[8] *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 439. Martyn's decision to translate Gregory's 'praepositus' as 'leader' rather than as the monastic second-in-charge 'prior' seems mistaken. In point of fact, when writing about religious topics, Gregory frequently uses the term 'praepositus' to refer to a prior. For example, *Registrum* iii.3; v.4; and ix.20 clearly refer to a religious prior; though in *Registrum* iv.30 the term appears simply to describe someone 'in charge', and in v.59 to a secular leader. The *SC* edition translates: 'A Augustin, votre prieur, qui part vous rejoinder, et que nous avons nommé votre abbé': *Bède le Vénérable, Histoire ecclésiastique*, i.195.

Richard Shaw has demonstrated not only how little information Bede had to work with, but has also drawn attention to the narrative skill with which Bede managed to make so much from it.[9] In the case of Bede's story of the monks' anxiety, it becomes clear from a careful study that Bede need have had no more information about Augustine's journey than was contained in Gregory's letter. Bede's interpretation of the monks' fear as resting on the nature of the 'fierce' ('fera') English and their alien 'language' ('lingua') can be seen to be based entirely upon a phrase he gleaned from Gregory's letter, namely the papal injunction not to be deterred by the 'words of wicked men' ('maledicorum hominum linguae').[10] Under Bede's hand, Gregory's moral observation (the original subject of which we shall explore later) has morphed into an ethnographic and linguistic one.

On reflection, it is not entirely surprising that Bede would have been led to interpret Gregory's letter in a psychological manner, for he may have been influenced by other comparable narratives of missional near failure. The closest of these is his account of the retreat to the continent of Mellitus and Justus following the apostasy of the East Saxons. In a curiously similar conference to that which Bede claims Augustine and his monks held, Mellitus and Justus are described discussing matters with Laurence (Augustine's successor): 'it was decided by common consent that they should all return to their own country and serve God with a clear conscience rather than remain fruitlessly among these barbarians who rebelled against the faith'.[11] Both this account and the earlier one in Gaul refer identically to the decision being made together ('communi consilio') and in response to the 'barbari' English. Indeed, as in the earlier instance, this mission too is only saved by a papal intervention: Laurence is prevented from abandoning Kent by a vision of St Peter just as Augustine's monks' nerves are (allegedly) steadied by Pope Gregory.[12] It is notable that Bede treated the initial failure of the Irish mission to Northumbria in a similar way. Aidan's predecessor complained 'in concilio' of the Northumbrians that 'they were an untameable people, both rough and barbarian ('barbarae') in thought'.[13] Charles Plummer noted the parallels when commenting on the earlier Gallic episode: 'much the same complaint was made by the first missionary sent from Iona to

[9] R. Shaw, *The Gregorian mission to Kent in Bede's* Ecclesiastical history*: methodology and sources*, London–New York 2018.

[10] *HE* i.23; *Registrum* vi.53.

[11] 'Decretumque est communi consilio, quia satius esset, ut omnes patriam redeuntes, libera ibi mente Domino deseruirent, quam inter rebelles fidei barbaros sine fructu residerent': *HE* ii.5, pp. 152–3.

[12] *HE* ii.6.

[13] 'essent homines indomabiles et durae ac barbarae mentis': *HE* iii.5, p. 228 (my translation).

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Northumbria'.[14] And there are further echoes in Bede's account of Paulinus' flight from York back to Kent because of the violence of the 'barbarus' Caedwalla and his ally Penda.[15] Bede's psychological interpretation of Gregory's letter and Augustine's return to Rome may have been shaped by other stories of missional crisis and should be treated with caution.[16]

The political interpretation: the impact of the death of Childebert

Since there are reasons to query Bede's psychological interpretation, it would be sensible to consider alternative reasons for Augustine's return to Rome. Many historians have come to ascribe a political interpretation to the set-back. This focuses on the impact of the death of the Austrasian king Childebert II in 596 which, it is claimed, was unknown to Augustine on his initial departure from Rome. Following the 587 Treaty of Andelot, Childebert had been declared heir to Guntramn of Burgundy and, on Guntramn's death, Childebert became king over most of Gaul. Gregory may well have hoped that he would have been a key secular ally in the papal mission and his death certainly occasioned major domestic political upheaval. According to Fredegar's *Chronicle* the twelve-year-old Chlothar II of Neustria and his mother Fredegund seized the opportunity to attack Childebert's young heirs, Theudebert II of Austrasia and Theuderic II of Burgundy. Chlothar took control of Paris and other cities and 'made great carnage' of the Austrasian and Burgundian forces.[17] Shaw, summarising an argument made by many historians, concludes that having learnt of Childebert's death: 'there was every reason for Augustine to return to Rome in the summer of 596 to take stock with the pope, not least to request new letters of introduction, now that the main political figure, Childebert, with whom they would have been expecting to work, was dead'.[18]

[14] *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum; Historiam abbatum; Epistolam ad Ecgberctum, una cum Historia abbatum auctore anonymo*, ed. C. Plummer, Oxford 1896, ii. 37.

[15] *HE* ii.20, p. 202.

[16] Perhaps, ultimately, these drew on St Peter's denial of Christ and his second calling as recounted in John xxi.

[17] 'grauiter trucidauit': *The fourth book of the chronicle of Fredegar: with its continuations*, ed. and trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, London 1960, 12. Fredegar's *Chronicle* was probably composed around 655–60: *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, ed. R. Collins, Hannover 2007, 26. Fredegar's main source for the period 584 to 613 appears to have been a Burgundian document ordered according to the regnal dates of Guntramn and Theuderic II: *Fredegar-Chroniken*, 44.

[18] Shaw, *The Gregorian mission*, 32. Similar views are expressed by N. J. Higham, *The convert kings: power and religious affiliation in early Anglo-Saxon England*, Manchester 1997, 75–6, and Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 25–6, 29.

As a pragmatic explanation for Augustine's return to Rome there is something to commend this interpretation, but the details are not quite as convincing as they might appear. In 1982 Margarete Weidemann assembled the contradictory annalistic records of the period to reconstruct a likely date for Childebert's death as between 2 and 28 March 596.[19] How long might it have taken for the news to reach Rome? This is difficult to answer and can only be guessed at by comparison. Michael McCormick has shown, based on ninth-century journey accounts, that it might take between one and two months to travel from Reims to Rome on non-urgent business.[20] This, though, followed the more direct transalpine route whereas in the late sixth century the route from (say) Metz would presumably pass *via* Chalon-sur-Saône and Mâcon to Lyons, and then descend the Rhône to Marseilles; from there the remainder of the journey would probably be by ship.[21] Nevertheless, the travel times were perhaps not enormously different.[22] In addition, one has to factor in the possibility that, given the nature of the information, a dedicated messenger to Rome might travel far faster. A one- to two-month journey following Childebert's death would mean that the news could have reached Rome anytime between the first week of April and the final week of May.

Is it possible that Augustine missed the news? Naturally, the answer depends on the date of Augustine's initial departure from Rome, which we do not know (we only know that his second departure from Rome took place on, or soon after, 23 July). However, assuming that Augustine travelled to France by ship, he is unlikely to have departed Rome earlier than late May since the seas were considered too unpredictable before this date. McCormick's analysis of surviving papal letters to Gaul shows that these were almost all sent in June and July.[23] Records of later departures for England also point to a period in the summer: in 601 Mellitus and Laurence set out on or after 22 June and in 668 Theodore and Hadrian left Rome on or after 27 May. In sum, though the news of Childebert's death could have arrived after Augustine's departure this is

[19] M. Weidemann, 'Zur Chronologie der Merowinger im 6. Jahrhundert', *Francia* x (1982), 471–513 at p. 491. The former date is given by Childebert's issuing of a legal decree in Cologne on this day. The latter marks the start of Childebert's regnal year. According to Fredegund's *Chronicle*, Childebert died in the fourth year of his reign, which Weidemann calculates began in 592.

[20] M. McCormick, *Origins of the European economy: communication and commerce, AD 300–900*, Cambridge 2001, 479.

[21] Ibid. 81–2.

[22] Based on an average daily pace of 30km, the 750km from Metz to Marseilles would take around twenty-six days. A coast-hugging sea-route from Marseilles to Rome of approximately 900km, sailing at 2 knots and only during daylight hours, would take around 20 days.

[23] McCormick, *Origins*, 80–1.

by no means certain. Indeed, it is possible that the news was already a month or more old when Augustine set out from Rome the first time.[24]

Other factors add to the uncertainty of Childebert's death being the decisive issue in prompting Augustine's return to Rome. On his second departure Augustine bore letters (dated 23 July) addressed to Childebert's mother, Brunhild, and his two young, orphaned sons, Theudebert and Theuderic. Curiously, these make no mention whatsoever of Childebert's death. Elsewhere among Gregory's letters we find examples of the pope addressing suitably pastoral remarks to the recently bereaved. In 599, for example, Gregory wrote to a certain Aurelius: 'Having heard of the passing away of your brother, a son most dear to me, an epistolary address cannot express with what grief I have been struck. But I beg our almighty Lord to console you.'[25] In complete contrast there is not the slightest suggestion of any pastoral concern expressed to the Merovingian royal family. Indeed, a careful reading of these letters suggests that Gregory might already have communicated with them since Childebert's death. Significantly, Gregory begins his 23 July letter to the young rulers, Theudebert and Theuderic, by noting that 'we received from you plenty of evidence for believing that you really wanted your subjects to be converted to that faith, in that you are of course their kings and lords'.[26]

When did Gregory receive this 'evidence'? Some form of communication dating between the death of Childebert and 23 July might well be assumed. Three answers can be offered: first, it could have been Augustine himself who brought back letters from the young kings (and Brunhild) with the news of Childebert's death. But in that case the lack of a pastoral response remains peculiar. Second, Gregory could have received the news and had already sent a reply (with suitable pastoral remarks) during Augustine's

[24] See also A. S. Cook, 'Augustine's journey from Rome to Richborough', *Speculum* i (1926), 375–97 at pp. 382–4, though Cook's estimates assume direct blue-water shipping rather than longer coast-hugging routes. On a note of personal speculation, I wonder whether Augustine's initial departure might have taken place on 22 June 596. 22 June was the British martyr St Alban's feast day, surely a propitious date to inaugurate a mission to Britain. Certainly, the second wave of the mission, sent in 601, seems to have done so for it included letters dated 22 June. A 22 June departure in 596 would require that Augustine's journey to Provence and back took a month, which is not impossible.

[25] 'Audito dulcissimi filii mei fratris uestri transit, quo sim maerore perculsus, epistularis non ualet explere locutio. Sed omnipotentem Dominum rogo ut … consoletur uos': *Registrum* ix.218, p. 781; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 682. See also expressions of consolation in *Registrum* i.11; ix.220; and xi.6.

[26] 'Magnam de uobis materiam praesumendi concepimus, quod subiectos uestros ad eam conuerti fidem per omnia cupiatis, in qua eorum nempe estis reges et domini': Registrum vi.51, p. 424; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 438.

absence.[27] If that were so, there would indeed have been no need to mention Childebert's death in the letters Augustine took back to France in July. However, a third answer would be that the news of Childebert's death had reached Gregory and had already been responded to before Augustine's original departure. If that were the case, we would then need to look for some other reason for Augustine's return to Rome.

Constructing a new economic interpretation: clerical rivalry and the 'tongues of wicked men'

Interpretations of Augustine's return to Rome that take note of the changing political landscape of Gaul may have value. Indeed, they might contribute to understanding what Gregory meant when he referred in his letter to the monks to 'the labour of the journey' ('labor … itineris'), though it is noteworthy that Gregory makes no explicit remarks about secular political matters. However, Gregory does add a second phrase warning against 'the tongues of wicked men' ('maledicorum hominum linguae').[28] In the next part of this article I will explore what this phrase might allude to using Gregory's own words and consequently suggest that there may be another way of understanding Augustine's return to Rome.

Most secondary discussions of the phrase, taking their lead from Bede's interpretation of Gregory's letter, have tended to see those referred to as bearers of bad or discouraging news.[29] But this is not in fact how Gregory uses similar expressions. Rather, Gregory tends to employ the nexus of 'speech' and 'wickedness' in cases where he is commenting on clerical disharmony caused by the devil's stirring up of pride. The clearest instances occur in correspondence between Gregory and his personal nominee for the Milanese episcopate, Bishop Constantius. Relations between Constantius and his fellow clergy had soured disastrously during the Three Chapters controversy, to the extent that three of Constantius' episcopal colleagues had persuaded the Lombard queen, Theodelinda, to refrain from receiving communion from him.[30] In September 593 Gregory wrote to Constantius to tell him he had heard the bad news and

[27] A second letter from Gregory to Brunhild also sent in July (*Registrum* vi.58) bears witness to at least one visitor who had reached Rome (presumably) during Augustine's absence: a Frankish priest called Leuparic whom Brunhild had sent requesting apostolic relics for the church of Saintes. Leuparic is also unlikely to have been a bearer of the news of Childebert's death since his letter, too, lacks any pastoral content.

[28] *Registrum* vi.53, p. 426 (translations mine).

[29] In addition to those mentioned above see also Higham, *Convert kings*, 76, which applies the expression to bad news about Chlothar's invasion.

[30] On the Three Chapters controversy see R. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his world*, Cambridge 1997, 125–42.

that Theodelinda 'has been seduced to some small degree *by the words of wicked men* ('prauorum hominum uerbis')'.[31] The controversy lingered and in November 596 (just four months after writing to Augustine's monks) the pope wrote again to Constantius. Here the full connection between wicked clerical speech and Satan is made plain:

> Know that I already heard some time ago from the reports of many, with what *darts of tongues and traps of wicked hearts* ('linguarum iaculis et malorum cordium insidiis') *the ancient enemy of the human race* thought you should be entrapped … which we believe were made up from *the rumours of wicked men* ('maledicorum hominum rumoribus').[32]

Other papal letters contain similar expressions. On 23 July 592, for example, Gregory responded to a letter he had received from Dominic, bishop of Carthage, which acknowledged Gregory's election as pope. Some diplomatic delicacy was required since Dominic's letter was not only impolitely late, it also contained a robust defence of Carthage's privileges against perceived Roman encroachment. Gregory's careful reply commended Dominic for displaying the virtue of fraternal love but warned of the ongoing risk of acrimonious relations between them by the devil's stirrings: 'And so, most saintly brother, let us hold this mother and guardian of virtues [i.e. love] with unbreakable stability. Let no *tongues of the deceitful* ('subdolorum linguae') diminish it in us, no treachery from *our ancient enemy* corrupt it.'[33]

The image of the disruption of clerical relations by the devil's proud whisperings occurs again in a letter to John, patriarch of Constantinople, dated 1 June 595. There Gregory expresses his shock at discovering that John had adopted the title of 'ecumenical' (i.e. universal) patriarch.[34]

[31] 'prauorum hominum uerbis ad paululam seducta est': *Registrum* iv.2, p. 218; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 288.

[32] 'Antiquus humani generis inimicus quibus uos linguarum iaculis et malorum cordium insidiis existimauit impetendos, relatione multorum iam dudum me audisse cognoscite … quae maledicorum hominum rumoribus conficta credimus': *Registrum* vii.14, p. 463; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 466, with minor emendations rendering the translation more literal.

[33] 'Hanc ergo matrem custodemque uirtutum, sanctissime frater, inconcussa stabilitate teneamus. Nullae in nobis eam subdolorum linguae imminuant, nullae antiqui hostis insidiae corrumpant': *Registrum* ii.40, p. 127; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 219.

[34] For background see G. E. Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great and the sixth-century dispute over the ecumenical title', *Theological Studies* lxx (2009), 600–21. For a parallel treatment to what follows on John, pride and Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* see C. Cubitt, 'Ostriches, spiders' webs and antichrist: hypocrisy in writings of Pope Gregory the Great and Archbishop Wulfstan II of York', in C. Cubitt, C. Methuen and A. Spicer (eds), *The Church, hypocrisy and dissimulation* (Studies in Church History lx, 2024), 64–90 at pp. 73–9.

He wrote to John to warn him against the sin of pride (with a nod to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve), scandalised that

> that most holy friend of mine, Lord John, a man of such great abstinence and humility, after being *seduced by friendly tongues* ('familiarum seductione linguarum'), has resorted to such great arrogance, that in his appetite for a perverse title, *he tries to be like him* [viz. Adam] *who, while arrogantly wanting to be like God, even lost the grace of the likeness given to him.*[35]

Finally, in the same manner, in June 597 Gregory writes to another close confidant, Narses, a pious courtier in the orbit of the emperor who was engaged in various religious and political struggles involving Constantinople's patriarch.[36] The precise context is not known, though in earlier letters Gregory had been relying on Narses in the resolution of a dispute with John of Constantinople about the treatment of two allegedly heretical clergymen in addition to the ongoing acrimony over John's ecumenical title.[37] Gregory writes: 'Indeed, I know that from *the perverse comments by so many evil tongues* ('ex tot malarum linguarum peruersis sermonibus'), you are suffering a violent storm, and bear in your mind floods of contradiction.'[38]

Returning to Gregory's letter to Augustine's monks, seen in this wider context the expression 'maledicorum hominum linguae' takes on a particular resonance: it employs imagery Gregory uses elsewhere to describe the impact of the devil working to disrupt Christian relations.[39] The expression was no mere rhetorical flourish but reflected Gregory's deeper understanding of the nature of temptation. To appreciate this we may turn to Gregory's discussion of the phenomenon in his *Moralia in Iob*. Here Gregory allegorises the words of Job's wife who, in the face of Job's sufferings and inspired by Satan, tempts her husband to abandon his fortitude and to curse God:

> we ought to study the words of Job's wife carefully, those with which she tried to get [Job] to do evil. The *ancient enemy* does his worst to bend our upright mind, not only

[35] 'quod ille noster sanctissimus domnus Iohannes, tantae abstinentiae atque humilitatis uir, familiarum seductione linguarum ad tantam superbiam erupit, ut in appetitu peruersi nominis illi esse conetur similis, qui, dum superbe esse Deo similis uoluit': *Registrum* v.44, p. 332; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 367.

[36] 'Narses 9', *PLRE* IIIb, 932–3.

[37] See A. Viale, 'Gregory the Great and the Marcianists', *Byzantinoslavica: Revue internationale des études byzantines* lxx/1–2 (2019), 195–210, and P. Booth, 'Gregory and the Greek East', in B. Neil and M. Dal Santo (eds), *A companion to Gregory the Great*, Leiden 2013, 109–33 at pp. 115–16.

[38] 'Scio quidem quia ex tot … tempestatem ualidam pateris, in mente contradictionum fluctus sustines': *Registrum* vii.27, p. 484; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 481.

[39] See also *Registrum* iv.27 where Gregory warns Constantius of Milan against heeding 'mali homines', leading to an over-zealous disciplining of Fortunatus.

by himself but also by those who are close to us. When he cannot ruin our hearts by persuading us himself, he keeps after us secretly *by using the tongues of those near us* ('per linguas adhaerentium'). That is why we find the words, 'Beware of your own sons, and watch out for your own slaves.' The prophet also says, 'Let everyone guard himself against his neighbour and trust not even his own brother.' Elsewhere too it is written, 'A man's enemies are in his own household.' *The adversary is cunning*, and when he finds himself cast out of the hearts of good people, *he searches out their dearest friends and speaks flattering words through their mouths*, since they are so well liked. The power of love first pierces the heart; then Satan easily thrusts his persuasive sword into the armour of their interior rectitude. So after the loss of [Job's] property, the deaths of the children, the sores and ulceration of the body, *the ancient enemy makes use of his wife's tongue* ('antiquus hostis linguam mouit uxoris'). [40]

It was, in other words, typical of the nature of the devil's disruption of the faithful to infiltrate relationships that ought to have been close with words of proud temptation.[41] With the wider context of Gregory's imagery in mind it no longer seems obvious that when Gregory wrote to Augustine's monks he was referring to discouraging news about the barbarian Anglo-Saxons (as Bede thought) or those warning about logistical problems caused by Gallic civil war (as some modern historians have thought). Rather he was alluding to the perennial way in which the devil stirred up problems by invoking pride.

Pope Gregory, Candidus the rector of the Gallic papal estates, and Virgilius of Arles

Can we identify any evidence of acrimonious clerical relationships in Provence that could have inhibited the Kentish mission and that Gregory

[40] 'Ex uerbis autem male persuadentis coniugis uigilanter debemus aspicere quod antiquus aduersarius non solum per semetipsum sed per eos etiam qui nobis adhaerent, statum satagit nostrae mentis inclinare. Cum enim cor nostrum sua persuasione non subruit ad hoc nimirum per linguas adhaerentium repit. Hinc enim scriptum est: A filiis tuis caue, et a domesticis tuis attende. Hinc per prophetam dicitur: Unusquisque se a proximo suo custodiat et in omni fratre suo non habeat fiduciam. Hinc rursum scriptum est: Inimici hominis domestici eius. Callidus namque aduersarius cum a bonorum cordibus repelli se conspicit, eos qui ab illis ualde diliguntur exquirit; et per eorum uerba blandiens loquitur, qui plus ceteris amantur; ut dum uis amoris cor perforat, facile persuasionis eius gladius ad intimae rectitudinis munimina irrumpat. Post damna igitur rerum, post funera pignorum, post uulnera scissurasque membrorum, antiquus hostis linguam mouit uxoris': *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL cxliii, Turnhout 1979, III.viii.13, p. 122, commenting on Job ii.9; *Gregory the Great: moral reflections on the Book of Job*, trans. B. Kerns, Collegeville, MN 2014, i.192 (translation slightly adjusted).

[41] See also M. Baasten, *Pride according to Gregory the Great: a study of the Moralia*, New York 1986; Cubitt, 'Ostriches', 65–73. For Gregory's view on the devil's role in fomenting social instability see C. Straw, *Gregory the Great: perfection in imperfection*, Berkeley, CA 1991, 80–4.

might have considered a result of proud demonic interference? The answer is yes: among the letters that Augustine bore on his second journey to Gaul dated 23 July is one directed to the Gallic metropolitan, Bishop Virgilius of Arles, which contains a significant and unusual degree of criticism.[42] The suggestion that historians should focus on the relationship between Gregory and Virgilius is not, in fact, new. In 1970 Peter Hunter Blair had already briefly reflected, 'if we are looking for an explanation of [Gregory's] reference to the tongues of evil-speaking men … we may conjecture that perhaps it lay somewhere in the relations of Rome with the Gaulish church, particularly the metropolitans of Arles'.[43]

Gregory's letter to Virgilius falls into two parts. The first part concerns Augustine, the second Gregory's rector of the papal estates in Gaul, Candidus.[44] The letter begins eirenically and Gregory is detailed in his expectations:

> We are confident that your Fraternity is intent on good works, and that you prove yourself spontaneously in causes pleasing to God, and yet we believe it useful to address you with brotherly love, so that you may increase the love which you ought to provide voluntarily, thanks to the additional encouragement of our letter.[45]

Next Gregory introduces Augustine, emphasising his papal commission and commanding Virgilius to support him:

> And for that reason we inform you that we have sent Augustine to your Holiness, a monk and bearer of this letter, whose zeal and earnestness is well known to us, together with other monks, for the saving of souls. He himself will be able to tell you about this when placed in your presence. And in this matter, it is necessary that you assist him with prayer and help, and when need arises, provide him the support of your comfort, and refresh him with the consolation of a father and a priest, as is fitting.[46]

[42] 'Vergilius', *PCBE*, 1932–5.

[43] P. H. Blair, *The world of Bede*, Cambridge 1970, 51.

[44] 'Candidus', *PCBE*, 416–19.

[45] 'Quamuis fraternitatem uestram bonis esse intentam operibus et sponte se in causis exhibere Deo placitis confidamus, uerumtamen utile esse fraterna uos alloqui caritate credimus, ut solacia, quae ultro uos decet impendere, nostris quoque prouocati epistolis augeatis': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440.

[46] 'Atque ideo indicamus sanctitati uestrae Augustinum seruum Dei praesentium portitorem, cuius zelum et studium bene nobis est cognitum, cum aliis seruis Dei pro animarum nos illic compendio transmisisse, sicut uobis ipse coram positus poterit indicare. In qua re oratione uos eum et auxiliis adiuuare necesse est atque, ubi opus exegerit, solaciorum uestrorum ei praebere suffragia et paterna ac sacerdotali illum consolation, sicut conuenit': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440 (slightly amended).

This first section concludes by promising that Virgilius ultimately will share in the monks' heavenly reward if (and Gregory returns once more to the theme) 'you devoutly provide the abundance of your support' to Augustine.[47] Rhetorically, the initial fraternal love appeal and the final promise of a reward sandwich the papal command to aid Augustine.

None of Gregory's other July letters to Gallic bishops are as detailed or have quite the emphasis as that addressed to Virgilius. The joint commendatory letter to Pelagius of Tours and Serenus of Marseilles, for example, contains a simple statement directing them to aid Augustine: 'It is necessary that your Holiness should assist him [Augustine] with priestly support, and hasten to provide him with your comfort.'[48] Gregory's joint letter to Desiderius of Vienne and Syagrius of Autun shows signs of slightly more emotional manipulation – Gregory writes of his hope for the confirmation of 'the good things we have heard about you' – but this is all and there is no promise of an eternal reward to sweeten the pill.[49]

Clearly, Gregory considered Virgilius' aid particularly important to Augustine's mission. In itself this ought not to be surprising given that Virgilius was the papal vicar and (in Gregory's mind at least) the leading Gallic cleric.[50] Historically, the ecclesiastical province of Britain had fallen under the supervision of the Gallic Church and thus Virgilius might be assumed to be a key ally to the English mission.[51] Notwithstanding this, Gregory's fulsome commendation of Augustine may also have been intended to allay any suspicions Virgilius might have had about a foreign party of monks arriving on his doorstep. One of Virgilius' predecessors, Sapaudus, had convened a synod in Arles in 554 which had attempted to place some controls over the religious life including requiring 'that monasteries and the discipline of the monks in them pertain to the bishop in whose territory they are located' and 'that it is not permitted for abbots to wander far from the monastery without the permission of their bishops. If one does so, according to the historic canons, he is to be restored to order by his bishop'.[52] If Virgilius were inclined to be

[47] 'suffragii uestri deuote copiam ministratis': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440.

[48] 'Quem necesse est ut sacerdotali studio sanctitas uestra adiuuare et sua ei solacia praebere festinet': *Registrum* vi.52, p. 425; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 439.

[49] 'bona quae de uobis opinion narrante didicimus': *Registrum* vi.55, p. 428; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 441.

[50] Although, in fact, Gregory would later learn that the bishop of Autun had greater political sway in the Austrasian court.

[51] On Gregory's navigation of the canonical sensitivities involved in sending missionaries to Britain, even though it had its own Church, and in inviting Gallic episcopal participation see R. Flechner, 'Pope Gregory and the British: mission as a canonical problem', in H. Bouget and M. Coumert (eds), *En Marge*, Brest 2015, 47–65.

[52] 'Vt monastheria uel monacorum disciplina ad eum pertineant episcopum, in cuius sunt terretorio constituta', 'Vt abbatibus longius a monastherio uagari sine

obstructive, Gregory's detailed letter was surely designed to counteract that.[53]

Whilst the first part of Gregory's letter could be read as a straightforward commendation, the tone of the second part is markedly different. Here Gregory proceeds to deal with an obviously acrimonious matter regarding the management of the 'small patrimony' ('patrimoniolum'), Gregory's standard way of referring to the Gallic papal estates. In particular, Gregory expressed his displeasure with Virgilius' treatment of Candidus, Gregory's appointed rector of the estates, who had been sent out in September of the previous year:[54] 'Your Fraternity, being of one mind with us, *should also be keen to have commended* ('habere studeat commendatum') Candidus, a priest and our joint son, and the small patrimony of our Church, so that with the help of your Holiness something could thereby benefit the sustenance of the poor.'[55] It appears that Virgilius had neither recognised Candidus' authority nor released to him the revenues of the estates which had accrued under an earlier rector:

> Therefore, since *your predecessor* ('prodecessor uester') looked after this little patrimony, *for many years* ('per annos plurimos'), and *kept the payments he collected at his own place* ('collectas apud se pensiones seruauit'), let your fraternity consider to whom they belong and to whom they should be paid, and *restore them to us* ('nobis restituat') for the good of your soul, to be managed by our above-mentioned son and priest, Candidus.[56]

episcopi sui permissione non liceat. Quod si fecerit, iuxta antiquos canones ab episcopo suo regulariter corrigatur': *Concilia Arelatense A. 554*, 2, 3; *Concilia Galliae A. 511–A. 695*, ed. C. de Clercq, CCSL cxlviiiA, Turnhout 1963, 171 (my translation).

[53] In fact, Gregory several times intervened to defend monastic groups against Provençal bishops. In October 596 he wrote to Respecta, abbess of a female community in Marseilles, defending her against Bishop Serenus of Marseilles: *Registrum* vii.12; and in July 599 Gregory rebuked Virgilius in defence of the rights of a male community founded in Arles by Childebert I: *Registrum* ix.217.

[54] For dating, see Gregory's instructions to Candidus and the commendatory letters to Childebert and Brunhild: *Registrum* vi.5; vi.6; vi.10.

[55] 'Candidum autem presbyterum communem filium et patrimoniolum ecclesiae nostrae fraternitas uestra, quippe ut unanimis nobis, habere studeat commendatum, ut aliquid inde pauperum alimoniis sanctitate uestra ualeat adiuuante proficere': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440.

[56] 'Quia igitur patrimoniolum ipsum per annos plurimos prodecessor uester tenuit et collectas apud se pensiones seruauit, fraternitas uestra, cuius sint res uel quibus erogantur, consideret atque eas animae suae respectu suprascripto filio nostro Candido presbytero nobis restituat dirigendas': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440 (amended): Martyn's translation of *pensiones* as 'taxes' obscures the nature of the majority of the income as rent; an annual tax was additionally levied on the papal estates. I have therefore translated it as 'payments'.

The letter ends with a stinging rebuke: 'For it is greatly detestable that what has been guarded by the kings of the nations, *should be said to have been stolen* ('ablatum') *by bishops.*'[57]

The gravity of Gregory's dissatisfaction with Virgilius can be measured by the fact that another July letter borne by Augustine urged its recipient, Bishop Protasius of Aix, to intervene even to the extent of being willing to give legal testimony.[58] The vocabulary is very similar, but even more candid:

> Tell our brother, and fellow-bishop, Virgilius, that he must be ready *to send us the payments which his predecessor received from our little patrimony over many years, and kept in his own place*, because they belong to the poor. If perhaps he should somehow want to excuse himself, which we do not believe, then since you know the actual truth in more detail, as at that time you in fact held the office of steward ('cura uicedomini') in that church, discuss with him how the case stands, and warn him that he ought not to retain in his place the property of Saint Peter and his poor. But also, if perchance it proves necessary for our men, *do not refuse your testimony in the case* ('uestrum in causa testimonium non negate').[59]

The legal reference here fits with an earlier letter in September 595 from Gregory to Childebert requesting, if necessary, that the king exercise his justice to protect the estates so that any crime might 'be corrected by the justice of your power'.[60] Protasius was, therefore, to be prepared to submit evidence against Virgilius to the Merovingian monarchs should matters reach such a stage.

Returning to Gregory's letter to the monks, would not this dispute between Virgilius and Candidus fit the interpretation of the expression 'the tongues of wicked men' outlined above? Candidus' rightful authority over the past income of the estates was being resisted by Virgilius who, in Gregory's thought, had succumbed to demonic temptation to proudly overreach himself. But if this is true, what impact would Virgilius' failure to accept Candidus' authority have had on Augustine and his monks? One simple answer is: a shortage of money.

[57] 'Nam ualde est execrabile ut, quod a regibus gentium seruatum est, ab episcopis dicatur ablatum': *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427; translation mine. By *rex gentium* Gregory was almost certainly referring to Childebert: *Registrum* vi.6.

[58] 'Protasius', *PCBE*, 1560–1.

[59] 'Vergilio fratri et coepiscopo nostro dicite ut pensiones quas prodecessor eius per annos plurimos de patrimoniolo nostro percepit et apud se retinuit ad nos, quia pauperum res sunt, studeat destinare. Qui si forte aliquo se modo, quod non credimus, excusare uoluerit, uos, qui ueritatem ipsam subtilius nostis, reuera qui in ecclesia ipsa tunc tempore illo curam uicedomini gerebatis, qualiter se habeat causa disserite et ne res sancti Petri et pauperum eius apud se retinere debeat imminete. Sed et, si fortasse hominibus nostris necesse fuerit, uestrum in causa testimonium non negate': *Registrum* vi.56, p. 429; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 441–2 (adjusted).

[60] 'potestatis uestrae iustitia corrigatur': *Registrum* vi.6; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 406.

The Gallic papal estates and the funding of the English mission

Historians of the English mission have been oddly uninterested in the matter of its financing. Augustine's entourage, albeit perhaps not as large as the symbolic forty persons Bede mentions, would have needed funds to support not just their journey, but the creation and sustaining of a new diocese.[61] This would have included the resources to pay for food, clothing, travel, protection, gifts, land, tools, material and labour (the latter for the construction of churches and accommodation), as well as for the expensive liturgical necessities of wine and oil that would have been required. It is not at all obvious from the various commendatory letters that Gregory provided for Augustine to Gallic bishops and assorted Gallic royalty that these matters were simply to be paid for by them. Gregory's letters to the Merovingian monarchs focus on requests for safe passage. To Theuderic and Theudebert Gregory writes, 'may your power protect and aid them'.[62] And with fuller detail Gregory requests of Brunhild, 'may your excellency … devote to him the grace of her support and bring the assistance of her protection to his work and … provide for him to travel safe by her protection'.[63] The papal letters to the Gallic bishops refer rather generically to providing 'solacia', which might be taken to indicate board and lodging during the party's stay in their dioceses.[64] None of the letters imply that Gregory expected long-term or substantial financial assistance. Neither is it credible that we imagine that Gregory would have assumed that the bulk of the financing of the mission would have been met by Æthelberht, though donations might well have been expected. It seems more plausible to believe that Gregory planned to provide Augustine's company with some other form of financial assistance. The fact that on his second journey from Rome Augustine bore a letter concerned with accessing money from the Gallic papal estates is surely indicative of Gregory's real intentions: the pope had envisaged the Kentish mission would be provided for from their accumulated reserves and ongoing proceeds. However, the plan was disrupted when Virgilius refused to relinquish his hold over the past income and so Augustine needed Gregory's intervention to force Virgilius' hand.

The precise origin of the papal estates in Gaul is not known.[65] They appear to have been located in the region of Arles and Marseilles. The

[61] *HE* i.25: 'nearly ('ferme') forty in number'. For discussion of this figure, Bede's source and his attitude to it, see Shaw, *The Gregorian mission*, 39–40, 44.

[62] 'uestra eos potestas tueatur et adiuuet': *Registrum* vi.51, p. 424 (translation mine).

[63] 'Excellentia ergo uestra … ei tuitionis suae gratiam uehementer impendat et labori eius patrocinii sui ferat auxilium et … sua tuitione securum ire prouideat': *Registrum* vi.60, p. 433 (translation mine).

[64] *Registrum* vi.52; vi.55.

[65] On their history see G. I. Halfond, '*Patrimoniolum ecclesiae nostrae*: the papal estates in Merovingian Provence', *Comitatus* xxxviii (2007), 1–19. On the wider estates see D. Moreau, 'Les Patrimoines de l'église romaine jusqu'a à la mort de Grégoire le

first possible mention of them dates to the pontificate of Agapetus I in a letter written in 535 and addressed to Caesarius of Arles.[66] In this Agapetus declined Caesarius' request to alienate certain church property (possibly papal land) for charitable purposes. We next hear of the estates during the pontificate of Pelagius I in 556 and again in 557 when their rector was the governor of Provence, the *patricius* Placidus.[67] By 593, they were under the oversight of another governor, the *patricius* Dynamius.[68] But who had custody of them between Placidus and Dynamius? In his letter to Virgilius, Gregory referred to 'many years' ('anni plurimi') of missing receipts from 'your predecessor' ('prodecessor uester').[69] Since Virgilius' direct predecessor, Licerius, only held office for two years (586–8), it is more likely that Gregory was referring to Sapaudus, bishop of Arles from at least 552 until 586.[70] This likelihood is reinforced by a detail in Gregory's letter to Protasius of Aix in which the pope referred to Protasius having knowledge of the missing receipts since he had previously been 'steward' ('uicedominus') of the see of Arles.[71] Protasius' own predecessor was still bishop of Aix in 585, indicating that Protasius' period of office as steward would have fallen during the episcopacy of Sapaudus (and perhaps his successor Licerius, too).[72] Significantly, Sapaudus was the son of the *patricius* Placidus indicating that the rectorship of the papacy's Gallic estates had passed within the family from secular to episcopal control, sometime after 557. By 581 Dynamius had become *patricius*, but how soon after this he also became rector of the estates is not clear. Complicating matters is the fact that Dynamius underwent a period of exile between 587 and 592.[73] In a letter to Childebert, dated September 595, Gregory described Dynamius as having looked after the estates 'on our recommendation' ('ex nostra commendatione') which suggests the

Grand', *Antiquité tardive* xiv (2006), 79–93. For an older discussion see E. Spearing, *The patrimony of the Roman Church in the time of Gregory the Great*, Cambridge 1918.

[66] *Epistulae Arelatenses genuinae* 36, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH, Epistolae, III: Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi i, Berlin 1892, 55. The letter is translated in W. E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: life, testament, letters*, Liverpool 1994, 114–16, and Moreau, 'Les Patrimoines', 86.

[67] 'Placidus 3', *PCBE*, 1491–2.

[68] The sequence is summarised by J. Richards in *The popes and the papacy in the early Middle Ages, 476–752*, London 1979, 316. On Dynamius see B. Dumézil, 'Le Patrice Dynamius et son réseau: culture aristocratique et transformation des pouvoirs autour de Lérins dans la second moitié du vie siècle', in Y. Codou and M. Lauwers (eds), *Lérins, une île sainte de l'antiquité au moyen âge*, Turnhout 2009, 167–94; and also 'Dynamius 3', *PCBE*, 600–3.

[69] *Registrum* vi.54; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 440.

[70] See 'Licerius 4', *PCBE*, 1174, and 'Sapaudus 4', *PCBE*, 1706–13.

[71] *Registrum* vi.56; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 441; 'Protasius', *PCBE*, 1560–1.

[72] L. Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaule*, I: *Provinces du sud-est*, Paris 1907, 280.

[73] Dumézil, 'Le Patrice Dynamius', 162–3.

confirmation of his appointment was relatively recent and dating to Gregory's pontificate, though it might have built upon his earlier association with the estates before his exile.[74]

The second half of the sixth century saw considerable disruption in the administration of the Gallic papal estates. Gregory's letter to Virgilius suggests that this had resulted in a significant accumulation of income that had not been passed on to Rome. How long this situation had been going on is unclear but there is a hint that payments had already broken down as early as 556. In December of that year the new pope, Pelagius, had written to Sapaudus requesting he put pressure on his father Placidus to send proceeds in the form of clothing. The request does not seem to have been answered for Pelagius repeated his request four months later.[75] Unfortunately, records of correspondence between Rome and Arles thereafter cease until the start of Gregory's pontificate (in 590), but it is possible that by the time he was writing there had already been a long history of local authorities in Gaul appropriating Gallic papal revenues for themselves.

The income itself would have consisted of the accrual of an annual payment from those who farmed the estates plus an annual tax.[76] Though Gregory consistently used the diminutive 'patrimoniolum', their cumulative worth was not insignificant. In April of 593 Gregory acknowledged the receipt of 400 Gallic *solidi* from Dynamius.[77] It is most likely that this sum represented a year's rents, since Dynamius' return from exile only took place in 592. Gregory sent another letter to Dynamius in July 594 which might indicate the receipt in Rome of a second payment and signal the re-emergence of an annual transfer.[78] For comparison, 400 Roman *solidi* (a slightly higher value weight of coinage than the Gallic version) was the figure that in 601 Gregory reckoned sufficient to fund the salaries of all the clergy of the diocese of Naples and its donations to the poor.[79] If, as seems likely, Sapaudus was the debtor Gregory mentioned, and since he held the rectorship for nearly three decades, the accumulated income owing might have been as much as 12,000 Gallic *solidi*.[80]

[74] *Registrum* vi.6, p. 374; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 405.

[75] *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 49, 53, pp. 73, 77. The context for the refusal to relinquish the funds may have been Gallic suspicion about Pelagius' orthodoxy: see K. Sessa, 'Rome at war: the effects of crisis on Church and community in late antiquity', in G. Kalas and A. van Dijk (eds), *Urban developments in late antique and medieval Rome: revising the narrative of renewal*, Amsterdam 2021, 41–74 at pp. 62–4.

[76] Halfond, '*Patrimoniolum*', 4. [77] *Registrum* iii.33. [78] Ibid. iv.37.

[79] Ibid. xi.22. On coinage see P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European coinage*, I: *The early Middle Ages (5th–10th centuries)*, Cambridge 1986, 107.

[80] Though for comparison the larger papal estates in Italy and Sicily are likely annually to have proffered incomes of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Roman *solidi*: Richards, *The popes and the papacy*, 307–8.

Indeed, if Sapaudus was continuing his father's pattern of misappropriation, the amount could have been even higher.

When in 595 Dynamius ceased to be *patricius* Gregory took the opportunity to reassert control. In April he wrote to the tenants (*conductores*) that the estates were to be managed temporarily by Dynamius' successor, Arigius.[81] Pending the arrival of a newly-appointed rector from Rome the annual income was to be retained by one of their own. It would become clear that Gregory did not plan for his new rector merely to be an estate administrator; in due course his nominee would come to act as Gregory's agent for the reform of the Gallic Church.[82] Perhaps to forestall possible offence though, in letters dated 12 August 595 Gregory granted the *pallium* to Virgilius and confirmed his appointment as papal vicar to Childebert and the bishops of his kingdom.[83] Then in September of 595, Gregory dispatched his new rector Candidus with letters commending him to Brunhild and Childebert.[84] Curiously, the papal register does not include similar commendatory letters to Virgilius or any other bishops, perhaps suggesting some naivety on Gregory's part about the difficulties Candidus would face, something which would have been rectified by the suite of recommendations sent out with Augustine on his second journey in July of 596.

Though in his letters Gregory's rhetoric about the proceeds of the papal estates in Gaul (and elsewhere) mentioned that such money was meant to be spent on the 'poor' (*pauperes*), Gregory in fact seems to have used this designation as a slightly elastic catch-all for projects that fell outside of the normal upkeep of diocesan clergy and their buildings. On other occasions Gregory's letters reveal him expending income on ransoming captives and buying new bedding and clothing for nuns and elderly clerics.[85] Though funding the mission to Kent is never explicitly mentioned in the case of the Gallic income, Candidus' initial orders from Gregory reveal that the pope had certainly considered that future receipts were to be brought to bear on some form of ministry to the English. We should allow that Augustine likely brought with him further communication from Gregory expanding on this. Gregory's letter of September 595 thus famously commanded Candidus to purchase 'English boys who are about seventeen or

[81] *Registrum* v.31; see also vi.59. See 'Arigius 2', *PCBE*, 199–200.

[82] See, for example, *Registrum* vii.21 (investigation of the enslavement of Christians by Jews in Narbonne) and xi.34 (Gregory's rebuke of Desiderius of Vienne). Gregory's exhortations to Merovingian monarchs and bishops to hold reforming councils against simony were presumably also to be supported by Candidus.

[83] Ibid. v.58–60.

[84] Ibid. vi.5; vi.6; vi.10.

[85] Ibid. vii.23; xi.2. Gregory typically divided the expenditure of the Church four ways with 'the poor' receiving a quarter: *Registrum* v.48, which mentions and, unusually, departs from, this rule.

eighteen years old, so that they may profit by serving God in monasteries'.[86] Despite the oft-repeated suggestion that Gregory thought of the youths as future translators for Augustine's mission, there is no indication that this was his purpose or, indeed, that the commission was ever completed. The letters Gregory sent with Augustine in July 596 to Brunhild, Theuderic and Theudebert state that the pope had recommended Augustine take priests from Gaul with him, 'through whom [the missionaries] might understand their [sc. the English] thoughts'.[87] This suggests that the youths did not serve as translators, if they had ever been purchased at all.

What is less well recognised is that by September 595 Gregory had also begun to consider how to reclaim and spend past revenues which would have expanded considerably the amount of money Gregory had to spend on the English project. The matter is, unfortunately, obscured in Martyn's translation of Gregory's instructions to Candidus: 'And if you can recoup some degree of return from the coins, *the so-called "interest,"* ('quae dicuntur ablatae') we want you to purchase clothing for the poor from this also, and some young men, as we said before, who might profit by service to almighty God.'[88] A footnote by the translator speculates whether the word *ablata* here refers to a tax or to short-term interest. Later medieval Latin does indeed use the term *ablata* in these ways.[89] However, the plain meaning of *ablata* is 'stolen' and this fits with how Gregory uses the word elsewhere. In his letter commending Candidus to Childebert, for example, Gregory thanks the king for protecting the papal estates and requests his support so that 'if by chance anything has been done there against the law, or if some property is being retained by anyone, let the crime be corrected by the justice of your power, and *what has been stolen* ('quae ablata sunt'), restored to its rightful owner'.[90] It is

[86] 'pueros Anglos, qui sint ab annis decem et septem uel decem et octo, ut in monasteriis dati Deo proficiant': *Registrum* vi.10, p. 378; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 409.

[87] 'cum quibus eorum possint mentes agnoscere': *Registrum* vi.51, p. 424; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 438; see also *Registrum* vi.60.

[88] 'Si quid uero de pecuniis redituum, quae dicuntur ablatae recipere potueris, ex his quoque uestimenta pauperum compare te uolumes uel, sicut praefati sumus, pueros, qui in omnipotentis Deo seruitio proficiant': *Registrum* vi.10, p. 378; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 409. One older translation simply leaves the word in Latin: *The Book of pastoral rule, and selected epistles of Gregory the Great,* trans. J. Barmby, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second ser. xii, New York 1895, 190: 'from the monies accruing to revenue which are called *ablatae*'.

[89] C. Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, Graz 1954, i, col. 25a, 'ablata'.

[90] 'Si aliquod illic fortasse praeiudicium factum est aut res eiusdem patrimonioli ab aliquo detinentur, potestatis uestrae iustitia corrigatur et iuri pristino quae ablata sunt reformentur': *Registrum* vi.6, p. 374; *Letters of Gregory the Great* (trans. Martyn), 406 (adjusted).

this letter that lies behind Gregory's closing remark in July 596 to Virgilius, when he demanded the return of the revenues retained by his predecessor, that 'it is greatly detestable that what has been guarded by the kings of the nations [i.e. monarchs like Childebert] should be said *to have been stolen* ('ablatum') by bishops'.[91] A better translation of Gregory's initial instructions to Candidus would therefore read: 'if indeed you are able to recover anything *from the money of the revenues, which are said to have been stolen*'. Candidus' mission from its inception in September 595 thus included recouping lost revenues as well as harvesting future ones but, evidently, by July 596 he had had no success. Virgilius was sitting on them still and if Gregory had been hoping to draw on these reserves to fund Augustine's mission this represented a fundamental problem, one which would have necessitated Augustine's return to Rome.[92]

The economic path that led to Augustine's return to Rome

Pope Gregory received from Dynamius in 593 an initial payment from the Gallic estates of 400 Gallic *solidi*. A second payment from Dynamius may have arrived in 594. At this stage, Gregory had surely become aware that he now had access to a stream of regular income and, perhaps in conjunction with receiving a diplomatic communication from Kent, had begun to consider some form of mission.[93] When the office of rector fell vacant before April 595, Gregory prepared to reinforce his control over the Gallic estates. Candidus was dispatched in September with instructions to collect the ongoing revenues and to track down the missing years of money. According to Gregory's explicit instructions, both parts were to be used to free enslaved English youths and to enrol them in monasteries. On his arrival, however, Candidus was thwarted by Virgilius from accessing the lost payments. This information had not yet made its way back to Rome by the time Augustine was dispatched in late May or June 596. Soon after his arrival Augustine met with Candidus and received the bad news. Augustine swiftly returned to Rome to request a letter forcing Virgilius' hand. Gregory issued the requisite letter on 23 July, as well as other letters endorsing Augustine and reinforcing Candidus' authority among the Gallic bishops.[94] That all of these newly issued letters mention both

[91] *Registrum* vi.54, p. 427 (my translation).

[92] A point made by older commentators: A. J. Mason, *The mission of St Augustine to England*, Cambridge 1897, 18, and H. Haworth, *St Augustine of Canterbury*, London 1913, 7.

[93] The approach from Kent is mentioned in Gregory's July 596 joint letter to Theuderic and Theudebert: *Registrum* iv.51.

[94] *Registrum* vi.51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60. Bede includes a letter to Aetherius (of Lyons), mistakenly ascribing to him the see of Arles: *HE* i.24.

Augustine and Candidus reinforces the impression that the work of the two men was linked in Gregory's mind and perhaps even that they were expected to be travelling together through Gaul.[95] At the same time Gregory sent a private letter to Augustine's monks encouraging them not to be put off by the clerical machinations that they had become embroiled in: neither the 'labour of the journey nor the tongues of wicked men' should trouble them, the impasse would be broken. What caused the Kentish mission to stall, therefore, was not anxiety or (probably) secular politics, but the financial consequences of Gallic ecclesiastical hubris.

[95] Gregory's letters indicate that Candidus likely assisted Mellitus and his fellows, too. Candidus is described as bearer of a letter issued on 22 June 601, the same date as the letters carried by Mellitus: *Registrum* xi.44. However, Candidus is not mentioned in the commendatory letters borne by Mellitus implying he was not expected to journey with them (hence Gregory issuing two letters to Aregius: *Registrum* xi.44; xi.40, and to Virgilius: *Registrum* xi.38; xi.45).