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Gregory of Tours and the Myth of the Trojan Origins of the Franks

The myth of the Trojan origins of the Franks is one of the most enduring fictions in Latin, French, and, indeed, western literature. To a medieval audience, the myth explained the origin of a people who bequeathed their name to Francia and thence France; it gave them an ancient and noble past, an antiquity of civilisation to rival Rome. My concern in what follows is with the origin of the myth itself. When was it invented and by whom? How was an obscure Germanic-speaking people, a people without history, relative newcomers to the Roman world, able to invent a past for itself? In answering these questions, I seek to revise current scholarly orthodoxy which holds that the invention of the Trojan origins of the Franks is first found in the anonymous chronicler known as 'Fredegar' writing in the 650s, and was thus unknown to the bishop of late sixth century Gaul, Gregory of Tours. This view is, for instance, found in the three modern histories of the Franks, Zöllner (1970), Périn and Feffer (1987), and James (1988)[1]. Instead, I shall propose that the association of Franks with the Troy myth had a long history stretching back into the Roman empire, and that Gregory of Tours was aware of it, but chose to omit it from his history.

The story of the Trojan origins of the Franks, as found in 'Fredegar', is in two versions. As the following contracted paraphrase shows, both are a curious mixture of history and fable. In the first version, at 'Chronicles' book 2, chapters 4–6, Priam was the first king of the Franks at the time of Troy's fall. Thence Friga was chosen king, and the exiled Trojans divided themselves into two groups. One group went to Macedonia and, after merging with the local inhabitants, produced renowned warriors in the time of Philip and Alexander. Members of the other group were driven out of Asia Minor with their wives and children and, after wandering through many lands, they chose Francio as their king and took their name from him. They marched into Europe and settled between the Rhine, the Danube and the sea. There Francio died and, under the rule of *duces*, they withstood outside authority until Pompey brought them and other tribes in Germany under Roman authority. The Franks, however, with the Saxons as allies, threw off Pompey's authority and up to the present day no people had been able to overcome them. 'Fredegar' then goes on to recount that a third

[1] Erich Zöllner, Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts, Munich 1970, p. 5; Patrick Périn–Laure-Charlotte Feffer, Les Francs, 1: A la conquête de la Gaule, Paris 1987, p. 12; Edward James, The Franks, Oxford 1988, p. 235. See also František Graus, Troja und trojanische Herkunftssage im Mittelalter, in: Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter, ed. by Willi Erzgräber, Sigmaringen 1989, pp. 25–43, pp. 32–33. Walter Goffart, The Fredegar Problem Reconsidered, in his Rome's Fall and After, London 1989, p. 354 argues that 'Fredegar' was writing around 658.

group settled down on the banks of the Danube and chose a king, Torquotus. This group later settled on the Rhine as well[2].

The second version at 'Chronicles' 3.2 is less combative: Priam was the first king of the Franks and, after they had departed from Troy, they chose Friga. They divided into two parties, with one setting out for Macedonia and the other, under Friga, settling on the shore of the Danube. After a further subdivision, a group travelled to the Rhine where they began to build a city like Troy. They were called 'Franks' after Francio and they lived under *duces*, always denying the tyranny of outsiders[3].

Two observations can be made. Firstly, the names cited in both stories have lost their meaning and historical context. And secondly, although the second version is derivative from the first, the number of variations between the two indicate that no consistent account existed at the time of 'Fredegar'. This observation is reinforced by a further variation found in chapters 1–4 of the 'Liber Historiae Francorum', circa 727[4]. We can thus endorse Wallace-Hadrill who made the point in 1960 that 'Fredegar' did not invent the myth himself because it was already widely diffused and in a number of forms at the time he was writing[5].

Moreover, given that the Franks were the most successful of the 'Germanic successor kingdoms', given that people known as Franks had interacted with the Roman empire since the third century, and given the Gallo-Roman interest in personal and mythological descent, it is a source of surprise that one must wait until the middle of the seventh century in order to find the first formulation of the myth.

The significance of one's lineage was the most important and enduring indicator of social status in Roman society. In addition to an interest in personal descent, Romans had an interest in the antiquity and prestige of their empire. It was believed that Aeneas, goaded by fate, settled a remnant of the Trojan people in Latium and planted the seeds of Rome's future greatness. The journey of the Trojan exiles was a metaphor for the transportation of civilisation and the 'Aeneid' was the fundamental expression of Roman cultural identity and ideology.

The myth of Trojan origins was not solely the preserve of Mediterranean Rome, however. North of the Alps there occurred more than just the diffusion of knowledge of the 'Aeneid'. Already in the Age of Nero, the Arverni in central Gaul claimed they

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[2] 'Fredegar', Chronicae, ed. by Bruno Krusch (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 2) Hannover 1888, pp. 45–46.

[3] 'Fredegar', Chronicae (as n. 2) p. 93.

[4] Following the destruction of Troy and the flight of Aeneas to Italy, Priam and Antenor led a band of exiles which came to the Tanais river [the Don] and, crossing the Meotian swamps, pitched camp in Pannonia where they founded a city called Sicambria. The Trojans later helped the emperor Valentinian against rebellious Alans, for which they gained the name *Franci* or 'fierce' (*ferox*). Ten years after the alliance with Valentinian, the Franks were driven from Pannonia and Priam killed, because of their refusal to pay tribute to the emperor. They came to the Rhine and lived under long-haired kings of whom Faramund was the first. Liber Historiae Francorum, ed. by Bruno Krusch (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 2) Hannover 1888, pp. 241–244. The appearance of Valentinian and the Alans in this version tells us that the author of the 'Liber Historiae Francorum' knew more about recent history than 'Fredegar'.

[5] John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its continuations, London 1960, p. xii; Idem, The Long-Haired Kings, London 1962, p. 82.

were descended from Troy[6]. It was a powerful vehicle for propaganda because it asserted that their civilisation was on a par with Roman civilisation.

In late antique Gaul those who read Latin would have had an acquaintance with tales of Troy. The Dares and Dictys prose accounts of the Trojan war, the most popular source for medieval writers on the Trojan war, were probably composed in Gaul and certainly read there in the late empire. Ausonius wrote a free translation of Greek epitaphs on the heroes who were present at the Trojan war ('Epitaphia Heroum Qui Bello Troico Interfuerunt') and he flaunted his knowledge of Vergil in the nauseating 'Cento Nuptialis'. Sidonius Apollinaris, describing his country villa in a letter, mentioned an adjoining lake on which it was the custom of 'our elders' to imitate the contest of Drepanum as in the Troy myth[7]. The games re-enacted on the lake indicate both a living awareness of the 'Aeneid' and the ongoing claim of the Arverni to have affinity with wandering Trojans. Elsewhere, Sidonius calls the Arverni a people issued from Trojan blood[8], and in the late sixth century, Gregory associates them with the 'Aeneid' and Trojan imagery[9].

Whereas the instance of the Arverni claiming Trojan descent is well known from these authors, a parallel example, that of northern Gaul in the late empire, has not received treatment. The myth of the founding of Rome was certainly well appreciated in Roman Britain. A number of mosaics have survived with Vergilian subjects, such as the Lullingstone mosaic with an elegiac couplet recalling the 'Aeneid'. Indeed, there exists the only known instance of coins bearing a Vergilian quotation, those of the late third-century usurping Roman emperor Carausius bearing the legend *expectate veni* and variants[10]. The reason for the selection of this particular quotation is a profitable line of inquiry. The quotation is taken from the scene in the 'Aeneid' where the river Tiber addresses Aeneas at the site of future Rome[11]. Aeneas then utters a prayer in which he invokes the Tiber as the horned river, the lord of the waters of the western land[12]. An important observation is that the imagery Vergil uses of the Tiber here (*corniger fluvius*) he employed elsewhere for the Rhine. The Rhine is also horned but, because it had two tributaries, Vergil preferred the word *bicornis* ('twy-horned')[13]. In other authors, the imagery is interchangeable: Rutilius Namatianus used *bicornis* of the

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[6] *Arvernique ausi Latio se fingere fratres sanguine ab Iliaco populi*, Lucan, Bellum Civile, 1.427–428, ed. by John Wight Duff (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1928.

[7] *Nam moris istic fuit senioribus nostris agonem Drepanitanum Troianae superstitionis imitari*, Sidonius Apollinaris, Epistolae, 2.2.19, ed. by William Blair Anderson (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1936–1965; cf. Vergil, Aeneid, 5.114–286, ed. by Roger Aubrey Bashervill Mynors (Oxford Classical Texts) Oxford 1969.

[8] *Arvernorum, pro dolor, servitus, qui, si prisca replicarentur, audebant se quondam fratres Latio dicere et sanguine ab Illiaco populos computare*, Sidonius Apollinaris, Epistolae (as n. 7) 7.7.2.

[9] Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum, 4.30, ed. by Bruno Krusch (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 1.1) Hannover ²1937–1942; Gregory quotes Aeneid, 1.104–105, 118.

[10] Mosaic and coins: Anthony Birley, Life in Roman Britain, London 1964, p. 163.

[11] Vergil, Aeneid (as n. 7) 8.36–65 (*exspectate* occurs in line 38); cf. Aeneid, 2.282–283: *quibus Hector ab oris exspectate uenis?*

[12] *Corniger Hesperidum fluuius regnator aquarum*, Vergil, Aeneid (as n. 7) 8.77.

[13] *Extremique hominum Morini, Rhenusque bicornis*, Vergil, Aeneid (as n. 7) 8.727. *Bicornis* is used of the Rhine in the late fourth century, Ausonius, Mosella, 437, ed. by Hugh Gerard Evelyn-White (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1919–1921.

Tiber[14] and Ausonius *corniger* of the Moselle in northern Gaul[15]. As Vergil's imagery of the Tiber is transferable to a northern context, we may postulate that the imagery of the arrival of the founder at a horned river is also transferable.

Once the context of the quotation is appreciated, the appearance of this particular legend on Carausius' coins is striking. Carausius was a local authority who originated among the Menapii on the coast of Flanders, south of the mouths of the Rhine[16]. He was a northern usurping emperor in need of legitimacy for his regime. By minting coins with the Vergilian legend 'come, thou expected one', his propaganda evoked the weighty imagery of Aeneas' reception by the God of the Tiber at the site of future Rome. Carausius here is the expected one greeted by a river, in this case the Rhine. The significance of this is that men who accompany the expected one were not Trojans, they were Franks. We know from contemporary Panegyrics that, when he usurped, Carausius relied heavily on Frankish troops from the lower Rhine[17]. Thus, in the late third century, there is a confluence of military power, propaganda and foundation myth on the lower Rhine based on one of the most fundamental passages in the 'Aeneid'.

This is not the only association of the Trojans and the Rhineland peoples in Roman times. Tacitus' 'Germania' contains the story that Ulysses in his wanderings reached the lands of Germany and on the banks of the Rhine founded a city and dedicated an altar[18]. An interesting error occurs in the Peutinger Table where *Patavia* is recorded instead of *Batavia*. In the 'Aeneid', Antenor sailed to the northern coast of the Adriatic sea and founded *Patavium*, and the error, although probably the result of a vocal shift, suggests that Batavia could be confused with this aspect of the Trojan foundation myth[19]. Furthermore, we find in Ammianus Marcellinus a direct link between the fate of Trojan exiles and the original settlement of Gaul. Ammianus begins his excursus on the origins of the Gauls with a quote from the 'Aeneid', and goes on to state that a few Trojans who fled the destruction of Troy occupied 'these places' (*loca haec*) which were then deserted. Where *loca haec* were is unclear, but in the previous sentence he had recorded the belief that the inhabitants of Gaul were part indigenous and part immigrants from 'remote islands' and 'transrhenane lands' which were liable

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[14] Rutilius Namatianus, De Reditu Suo, 1.179, ed. by John Wight Duff–Arnold Mackay Duff, Minor Latin Poets 2 (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1935.

[15] Ausonius, Mosella (as n. 13) 469. Ovid used *corniger* for the stream in Latium where Aeneas perished, Metamorphoses, 14.602, ed. by Frank Justus Miller (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1916.

[16] *Carausius, Menapiae ciuis*, Aurelius Victor, Caesares, 39.20, ed. by Pierre Dufraigne, Aurelius Victor. Livre des Césars (Les Belles Lettres) Paris 1975, p. 51.

[17] Panegyrici Latini, 4.16–17, ed. by Edouard Galletier, Panégyriques Latins (Les Belles Lettres) Paris 1949–1955. A hostile panegyricus calls Carausius a 'fosterling' (*alumnus*) of Frankish tribes, Panegyrici Latini, 7.5.3.

[18] Tacitus, Germania, 3.2–3, ed. by Michael Winterbottom–Robert Maxwell Ogilvie, Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora (Oxford Classical Texts) Oxford 1975. Tacitus is non-committal on the veracity of the story.

[19] Vergil, Aeneid (as n. 7) 1.247; Konrad Miller, Die Weltkarte des Castorius, Ravensburg 1888 (the 'P' is distinct in *Segmentum* 2.1). According to Ekkehard Weber, Zur Datierung der Tabula Peutingeriana, in: Labor omnibus unus. Gerold Walser zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. by Heinz E. Herzig–Regula Frei-Stolba (Historia Einzelschriften 60) Stuttgart 1989, pp. 113–117, p. 116 the Peutinger Table dates to the first half of the fifth century.

to inundation. The description and context recall the Dutch coast and the lower Rhine, and their juxtaposition with *loca haec* implies that these are the deserted areas where the dispersed remnant of Troy settled before moving further south[20].

In this way, Ammianus, writing in the 380s, made a firm connection between the inhabitants on the lower Rhine, who at that time were Franks, and a belief that the region had been settled by Trojans. The fact that there was no Christian element to the story in this and later manifestations indicates that it had gained currency prior to the Christianisation of the Franks. Having been conceived during the usurpation of Carausius, it was later diffused with the ascent of Frankish influence in the fourth-century empire. Noticeably in 355, there was a great number of Franks at the court of the emperor Constantius II, and Frankish soldiers constituted a large component of the Roman army stationed in the Rhineland[21]. The future historian and young officer, Ammianus Marcellinus, perhaps first heard the story at this time, when he was at court in 355 and in Cologne soon after.

The evidence of Carausius' coins and the other Roman sources reveal that the myth of Trojan origins was not claimed solely by the Arverni and that a similar ideological claim existed for a Trojan settlement of the lower Rhine. The evidence indicates that Franks on the lower Rhine were inserted into the Troy story at an early stage prior to their Christianisation, some time between the late third and mid fourth centuries.

In the sixth century there was considerable interest in the origins of the barbarian *gentes* which controlled large tracts of the western Roman empire. Whereas the origins of Rome were ancient, stretching back to the sack of Troy, the barbarian aristocracies were recent political formations. They were not unitary entities and they did not have 'national' myths of foundation that could compare with the deeply conservative civilisation of the Mediterranean. Although they had received political legitimisation as federate peoples, an ideological legitimisation for their rule had to be manufactured.

Attempts were made to bridge the gap by Roman aristocrats who served in the courts of the federate barbarians. Drawing on Greek and Latin sources, Cassiodorus wrote a history of the Goths depicting them as an ancient *gens*. His contemporary, Jordanes, edited the 'history' and incorporated a largely mythical genealogy for the Amal line of Gothic kings[22]. Isidore of Seville held that the Goths were an ancient *gens*, and he was able to derive their name from the Biblical Magog, son of Japheth, and to set their early history in the Roman Republic[23]. The late sixth-century newcomers to

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[20] *Drysidae* [Druids] *memorant re vera fuisse populi partem indigenam, sed alios quoque ab insulis extimis confluxisse et tractibus transrhenanis, crebritate bellorum et alluvione fervidi maris sedibus suis expulsos. Aiunt quidam paucos post excidium Troiae fugitantes Graecos ubique dispersos loca haec occupasse tunc vacua*, Ammianus Marcellinus, 15.9.4–5, ed. by JOHN C. ROLFE (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1935–1940. The quotation from the 'Aeneid' which begins the excursus is *maius opus moveo*, Vergil, Aeneid (as n. 7) 7.44–45. See also the contemporary claim by Burgundians to be descended from Romans, Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.5.11.

[21] Ammianus Marcellinus (as n. 20) 15.5.11, 15.5.30; DIETRICH HOFFMANN, Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum 1 (Epigraphische Studien 7.1) Düsseldorf 1969, pp. 136–137.

[22] Jordanes, Getica, 79–81, ed. by THEODOR MOMMSEN (MGH Auctores Antiquissimi 5) Berlin 1882.

[23] Isidore of Seville, Historia vel Origo Gothorum 1–3, ed. by THEODOR MOMMSEN (MGH Auctores Antiquissimi 11) Berlin 1894; cf. Isidore of Seville, Etymologies, 9.2.89, ed. by MARC REYDELLET, Isidore de Séville. Étymologies livre IX. Les langues et les groupes sociaux, Paris 1984.

Italy, the Lombards were later given a legendary antiquity by Paul the Deacon[24]. Roman society required antiquity and nobility of ancestry and hence the need to fabricate long royal lineages and antique provenance to parallel Rome[25]. An instance of this fabrication is provided by Wagner's observation that the seventeen generations for the Amal line of the Goths suspiciously equal the seventeen generations between Aeneas and Romulus[26].

In the case of the Goths, because their foundation myth was constructed in Christian times, they were fitted into Christian tradition. Gog and Magog were of the line of Japheth, and they dwelt in the uttermost parts of the north, whence one day, it was prophesied, shall issue great hordes on horseback who shall descend through mountains and shake the land of Israel[27]. It was a small step for Christian thinkers such as Isidore to equate the Goths with men of the line of Gog and Magog[28].

Gregory of Tours' historical work is out of place in the above company of Roman aristocrats who manufactured lineages. Despite later attempts to make it as such, Gregory did not write a 'History of the Franks'[29]. Instead, he planned to record the wars of kings, the deeds of martyrs and the struggle of the Church against heretics, in what he calls his 'Ten Books of History' ('Decem Libri Historiarum')[30]. Gregory did not have the same tradition of Graeco-Roman authors on which to draw and, from the point of view of those readers who sought a 'national' myth of the Franks, his inquiry into the origins of Merovingian lineage foundered. In chapter 2.9, Gregory surveyed late Roman historians in order to ascertain the origin of the Merovingian kings but, having cobbled together a few references to Frankish *duces*, *subreguli* and an unnamed *rex*, he exclaimed that it is unknown who was the first king of the Franks[31]. The statement betrays the bishop's frustration, but it also protects his reputation because he was a good historian searching for historical references rather than lapsing into mythical lineages like Jordanes.

It was only at the end of his inquiry into the origins of the Frankish kings in chapter 2.9 that he allowed some speculation, what the tradition of his own day said:

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24 Paul the Deacon, Historia Langobardorum, Bk. 1 (1.18 for the Lombard genealogy), ed. by Ludwig Bethmann–Georg Waitz (MGH Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum) Hannover 1878.

25 This much is admitted by Cassiodorus, Variae, 9.25, ed. by Theodor Mommsen (MGH Auctores Antiquissimi 11) Berlin 1894.

26 Norbert Wagner, Bemerkungen zur Amalergenealogie, in: Beiträge zur Namenforschung, n.s. 14, 1979, pp. 26–43, p. 28.

27 Genesis, 10.2; Ezekiel, 38.1–3; Revelation, 20.7–8, ed. by Boniface Fischer et al., Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, Stuttgart ^{3}1983. See further: Andrew Anderson, Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations, Cambridge Mass. 1932, pp. 4–5.

28 Isidore of Seville, Historia vel Origo Gothorum (as n. 23) 1 and 66; Anderson (as n. 27) pp. 8–11.

29 Walter Goffart, From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and back again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours, in: Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble–John J. Contreni, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1987, pp. 55–76, p. 65.

30 *Scripturus bella regum cum gentibus adversis, martyrum cum paganis, eclesiarum cum hereticis, prius fidem meam proferre cupio, ut qui ligirit me non dubitet esse catholicum*, Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum (as n. 9) 1, praef.; *Decem Libros Historiarum … scripsi*, ibid. 10.31.

31 *Hanc nobis notitiam de Francis memorati historici reliquere, regibus non nominatis*, Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum (as n. 9) 2.9.

> 'It is said by many that the Franks had come from Pannonia and first inhabited the banks of the Rhine. Then, after having crossed the Rhine, they marched through Thoringia, where, in each canton and city, they chose long-haired kings from the principal and most noble family of their people.[32]

Scholars posit an explanation for this fiction: Pannonia was the birthplace of Saint Martin of Tours, and Gregory, bishop of Tours, must be allocating the Franks the same origin as the most powerful saint in sixth-century Gaul[33].

On closer thought, this postulation does not convince. In the following chapter, chapter 2.10, Gregory berates the early Franks for adhering to idolatrous practices, for worshipping images of beasts, and for making pagan sacrifices. It is unlikely that the bishop of Tours, the protector of the relics of Saint Martin, would consciously associate the homeland of the blessed Martin with demonic forces active among the early Franks. Moreover, neither Gregory nor Sulpicius Severus, the biographer of Saint Martin, for that matter stressed Martin's Pannonian origins. It was only a fact and we cannot conclude an association between Martin and the Franks from it. An alternate explanation is required.

We have seen the belief that Trojans settled on the lower Rhine had gained currency in the late Roman empire. The process whereby the mythological lineage of the Merovingians was spliced onto this existing belief cannot be outlined, but Gregory must certainly have known of it.

In the Byzantine east, John Lydus who died circa 570, over twenty years before Gregory, is the first known author to register a belief that *Franci* were named after a leader, that is Francus[34]. The existence of a *dux* Francus is also understood by Isidore of Seville's statement in his 'Etymologies': 'the Franci are thought to be called after a certain duke of their own'. Isidore then includes a second etymology that *Franci* comes from *ferox*[35]. Both components of Isidore's etymology of *Franci*, Francus and the Franks as *feroces*, are associated with the Troy story in later writers[36]. The awareness of Francus in Lydus means that the etymology did not originate with Isidore, but was received knowledge from an earlier time. In other words, Isidore's dual etymology of *Franci* is part of received knowledge already widely diffused across the Mediterranean. It follows that if Lydus in Byzantium was aware of these traditions, Gregory, writing in Gaul twenty years later, must have been aware of them but chose not to endorse them.

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[32] *Tradunt enim multi, eosdem [Francos] de Pannonia fuisse degressus, et primum quidem litora Rheni amnes incoluisse, dehinc, transacto Rheno, Thoringiam transmeasse, ibique iuxta pagus vel civitates regis crinitos super se creavisse de prima et, ut ita dicam, nobiliore suorum familia*, Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum (as n. 9) 2.9.

[33] E. g. Zöllner (as n. 1) p. 4; James (as n. 1) p. 235.

[34] John Lydus, De Magistratibus, 3.56, ed. by Anastasius Bandy, Ioannes Lydus. On Powers or The Magistrates of the Roman State, Philadelphia 1983, p. 218.

[35] *Franci a quodam proprio duce uocari putantur; alii eos [Francos] a feritate morum nuncupatos existimant. sunt enim in illis mores inconditi, naturalis ferocitas animorum*, Isidore of Seville, Etymologies (as n. 23) 9.2.101; Reydellet (as n. 23) p. 100 n. 138.

[36] 'Fredegar', Chronicae (as n. 2) 3.2; Liber Historiae Francorum (as n. 4) 2; Aimon, De Gestis Regum Francorum 1.1–2, ed. by Martin Bouquet, new edition by Léopold Delisle (Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France 3) Paris 1869 [Farnborough 1967].

Prior to Gregory writing his 'Ten Books of History', there had been a vigorous usurpation of Roman authority and tradition. The Frankish king Theudebert I, who reigned 534–548, was the first barbarian king to usurp the prerogative of the emperor to mint gold coins in his own image and legend[37]. It was an audacious appropriation of Roman cultural heritage and, moreover, an ideological claim to be heir to the Roman empire[38]. Theudebert also asserted in a letter to the emperor Justinian that he held authority over all Francia, northern Italy and Pannonia[39]. The claims were bold but Byzantium was in the process of recovering the western empire and the emperor, in seeking the Catholic Franks as his allies, did recognise the Merovingians as the rightful rulers in Gaul[40].

I believe that it was as part of the Merovingian appropriation of Roman tradition under Theudebert, that the Trojan myth was moulded onto the obscure Merovingian lineage. As we have seen the tradition of the Trojan settlement of the lower Rhine, the region whence the Franks sprang, had a long history. It was probably not till Theudebert that much was made of it. Although it was a weighty move to appropriate the Roman foundation myth, Theudebert could do it because by then it had been around for a long time, it was already an ancient and civilised 'national' identity. Doubtless, it was part of a larger process, the ethnogenesis of 'the Franks' as an historical people out of the mixed population of the northern region of empire. Theudebert's interest in Italy and his correspondence with the Byzantine court in turn carried the claim east where it was picked up by John Lydus[41].

This thesis still begs the question: if Gregory is aware of attempts to create a history for the Frankish *gens*, why does he not mention them directly in 'Libri Historiarum' 2.9? Gregory is also aware of the 'Aeneid'[42], but gives it some rough treatment:

> 'For it is not proper either to recall deceitful myths or to follow the wisdom of philosophers that is hostile to God, lest we slip into the penalty of eternal death when the Lord passes judgement ... I do not commemorate the flight of Saturn, the wrath of Juno, the debaucheries of Jupiter, the insult of Neptune, the sceptre of Aeolus, or the wars, shipwreck, and kingdoms of Aeneas. I say nothing about the mission of Cupid, the love for Ascanius and

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[37] Maurice Prou, Catalogue des Monnaies Françaises de la Bibliothèque Nationale. Les Monnaies Mérovingiennes, Paris 1892, pp. xxix–xxxv, 9–16. Procopius' response to the minting of these coins was to state that they would not be recognised anywhere, Procopius, History of the Wars, 7.33.6, ed. by Henry Bronson Dewing (Loeb Edition) Cambridge Mass. 1914–1940.

[38] Cf. Roger Collins, Theodebert I, 'Rex Magnus Francorum', in: Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society, ed. by Patrick Wormald–Donald Bullough–Roger Collins, Oxford 1983, pp. 7–33, p. 12: "by an early stage in his reign [Theodebert] had become, if not heir to the western Roman emperors, ... the most powerful ruler in west and central Europe".

[39] Epistulae Austrasicae, 20.2, ed. by Wilhelm Gundlach (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 117) Turnhout 1957, p. 439.

[40] Procopius, History of the Wars (as n. 37) 7.33.4.

[41] It is possible that the folklore etymology of *Francus* from *Franci* was invented in both the east and west and was not a consequence of diffusion west to east. However, the most important observation is that Frankish expansion into the Mediterranean in the early sixth century generated a desire to discover the founder of the *gens*.

[42] Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum (as n. 9) 2.29, 4.30, 4.46; Ormonde Maddock Dalton, The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours, 1: Introduction, Oxford 1927, p. 7 n. 2.

> the wedding, tears, and fearsome destruction of Dido, the gloomy entrance court of Pluto, the debauched rape of Persephone, or the triple heads of Cerberus; nor will I repeat the conversations of Anchises, the trickeries of the man from Ithaca [Odysseus], the cunning of Achilles, or the deceptions of Sinon. I will not recount the advice of Laocoon, the strength of Amphitryon's son [Hercules], or the contests, exiles, and fatal death of Janus. I will not describe the shapes of the Eumenides or of different monsters, nor the contrivances of the other myths that this author [Vergil] has either deceitfully fabricated or depicted in heroic verse.'[43]

Gregory is both displaying his erudition and disparaging pagan doctrine. He hurls a barb at the 'Aeneid', tempered with a cleric's passion, which suggests a learned dismissal of pagan superstition. The myth of the Trojan origins of the Franks was already current in Gregory's day and when he records the belief that the Franks issued from Pannonia, he is betraying an echo of it[44]. Yet the bishop rejected the story because the bishop discounted it both as pagan and as deceitful myth hostile to God[45]. Gregory's purpose was different to that of Cassiodorus, Jordanes, Isidore and Paul the Deacon. He did not write a history of the *gens Francorum*, he composed ecclesiastical history which began with the christian creation of the world rather than the foundation of Rome or myths of Frankish origins. Unlike other authors, he is more historical in that he gives little credence to mythological origins. Instead, he searched for evidence among his sources. Gregory was too good a historian and bishop to be bothered with it.

Thus the fusion of origin mythology of Frankish and Roman had long germination before the later seventh century. Its antecedents must be sought in the Gaul of the Roman empire, rather than the Francia of 'Fredegar'. It is most probable that it was known to Gregory, who glossed over it in preference for his collection of late-Roman sources. Ironically for Gregory, when it did enter the mainstream historical tradition, it became the preferred explanation for the origins of the Franks. Gregory's own inconclusive inquiry in 'Libri Historiarum' 2.9 was not good enough for a Medi-

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[43] *Non enim oportet fallaces commemorare fabulas neque philosophorum inimicam Deo sapientiam sequi, ne in iudicium aeternae mortis Domino, discernente, cadamus … Non ego Saturni fugam, non Iunonis iram, non Iovis stupra, non Neptuni iniuriam, non Eoli sceptra, non Aeneada bella, naufragio vel regna commemoro. Taceo Cupidinis emissionem, non Ascanii dilectionem emeneosque, lacrimas vel exitia saeva Didonis, non Plutonis triste vestibulum, non Proserpinae stuprosum raptum, non Cerberi triforme caput, non revolvam Anchisae colloquia, non Ithacis ingenia, non Achillis argutias, non Senonis fallacias. Non ego Laguonthe consilia, non Amphitrionidis robora, non Iani conflictus, fugas vel obitum exitiale proferam. Non Eomenidum variorumque monstrorum formas exponam, non reliquarum fabularum commenta, quae hic auctor aut finxit mendacio aut versu depinxit heroico*, Gregory of Tours, Liber in gloria Martyrum Beatorum, praef., ed. by Bruno Krusch (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 1.2) Hannover 1885. Translation by Raymond van Dam, Gregory of Tours. Glory of the Martyrs (Translated Texts for Historians) Liverpool 1988, p. 19.

[44] In the preface to his 'Liber in gloria Martyrum Beatorum' (as n. 43), Gregory says that Aeneas had set up a number of 'kingdoms' (*regna*), which suggests that he believed that the Trojan exiles founded multiple states, rather than just Rome.

[45] Equally, if the myth of Merovech as a sea monster was current in his day, a rational Gregory discounted it as well at the end of Libri Historiarum 2.9.

eval audience which sought a lively and definite story over a dry and inconclusive scholarly inquiry. By then the Trojan diaspora which had founded Mediterranean civilization had founded northern European civilization as well, and the northern periphery of the Roman world made Roman epic its own. In this way, the ideology of Rome came to play a central role in furnishing Francia with a legitimate Roman heritage[46].

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[46] A version of this paper was read to the Australia and New Zealand Medieval and Renaissance Society, University of Tasmania, February, 1994. I thank all who participated in the subsequent discussion.