

# Frankish Involvement in the Gregorian Mission to Kent

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As narrated in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*, Pope Gregory I was inspired by God to send Augustine, the former prior of Gregory's St Andrews monastery, to convert the English nation to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> This mission, known today as the Gregorian mission to Kent resulted in the conversion of the Kentish kingdom under King Aethelberht, and is an excellent example of the missionary movement within Europe at this time. Although it is seen by modern historians as well documented, many key elements surrounding the mission continue to be debated.<sup>2</sup> One such element that will be discussed within this article is the supposed involvement of the Merovingian kingdoms in Gregory's mission. The Merovingians were a powerful family which ruled Gaul at this time.<sup>3</sup> The kingdom was divided into two regions, Austro-Burgundy and Neustria.<sup>4</sup> It is the power and influence of the Merovingian kingdoms on the Gregorian mission that has recently garnered support within academia. Marilyn Dunn argues that the role of King Childebert II, ruler of the Austro-Burgundian kingdom, was heavily involved in the inception and implementation of the mission because of his rivalry with the Neustrian kingdom.<sup>5</sup> This kingdom was ruled by Chlothar II who, according to Ian Wood held authority over the English people through a marriage alliance.<sup>6</sup> This argument will be discussed in detail within this article, and will re-examine the evidence for the mission which supports these theories. It will show that their arguments greatly exaggerate the connection between the Merovingian kingdoms and the Gregorian mission to Kent. Although Childebert's court did play a role within the mission they did not initiate it, they simply aided the missionaries as they traversed through their realm. It will also argue that this mission must be

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1 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People: The Greater Chronicle: Bede's letter to Egbert*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.

2 R. Collins and J. McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow: Three Viewpoints on Augustine's Mission', in *Cross, Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in Memory of Richard Fletcher*, eds. Simon Barton and Peter Linehan (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2008), 17.

3 J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, with its continuations*, (London: Th. Nelson, 1960), 6-12.

4 Ibid.

5 M. Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons, c. 597-700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife*, (London Continuum, 2009), 51.

6 I. Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony in England', in *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe*, ed. M. O. H. Carver (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1992).

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examined through Gregory's apocalyptic world view rather than the supposed political motives of powerful monarchs within Merovingian Gaul.

Following Bede's account, the missionaries left Rome in 596, travelling through the Merovingian kingdoms within Gaul before crossing the channel to land at the Isle of Thanet within the Kentish kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Although they reached their destination relatively unharmed, Bede recounts how Augustine returned to Rome early in his journey due to the fear of the barbaric nature of the English.<sup>8</sup> His statement however, follows an interpretation of an epistle by Pope Gregory acquired for Bede by a London priest named Nothelm.<sup>9</sup> Composed on 23 July 596, Gregory addressed the missionaries: 'it had been better not to begin good works than to think of backing away from what had been started...do not let the tiresome journey or the tongues of abusive people deter you... complete what you have begun.'<sup>10</sup> An earlier Gregorian epistle shows that the missionaries had arrived in Provence before their fears had overtaken them and that the mission had left prior to 23 July.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear however, who these 'abusive people' Gregory refers to are. Bede's retelling sees them as the English, however this is not the only interpretation available. Why did Augustine feel the need to return to Rome? Was it as Bede recounts or were there other factors involved?

Although Bede is an invaluable resource from this period of English history, he was writing around a century after these events. This distance from these events must be taken into account when discussing the role of the Merovingian kingdoms on the mission. Bede writes little on the relations between Gaul and the missionaries, relations which were considered essential by Gregory to the monks' safe arrival on Kentish shores. This view can be seen in many surviving letters. For example, to Pelagius of Tours and Serenus of Marseilles (Bishops of Gaul) Gregory writes, 'it is necessary that your Holiness should assist him [Augustine] with priestly support, and hasten to provide him with your comfort.'<sup>12</sup> To the two Frankish kings Theudebert II and Theuderic II he wrote, 'we greet your excellencies with a father's love, and request that those whom we have sent might deserve the grace of your favour...let your power protect and assist them.'<sup>13</sup>

Ian Wood views the scarcity of Frankish information within Bede's text as a deliberate attempt to ignore the role of the Frankish clergy within the mission.<sup>14</sup> It is more likely however, that Bede was unaware of such a relationship. The corpus of letters surviving today concerning the relationship between the mission and Gaul are numerous and, to the modern historian the importance of the Franks can be seen. However these letters were not copied by Nothelm for Bede, he was unaware of their existence.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Bede gained access to Gregory of Tours' *Histories*, an influential text on Gaul. However this text only relates events up to 591, well before the missionaries set out for Kent.<sup>16</sup> From such a perspective Bede's retelling of the letter to Augustine's companions, that

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7 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 37-40.

8 *Ibid.*, 37.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Gregory and J. R. C. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 3 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 439.

11 *Ibid.*, 441-2.

12 *Ibid.*, 439.

13 *Ibid.*, 438.

14 I. Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine of Canterbury to the English', *Speculum*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (1994), 7.

15 See Martyn for letters unknown to Bede in Gregory and Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*.

16 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 26.

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they feared the barbaric English, is justified. Bede was unaware of the Frankish connection. A chronicle inaccessible to Bede may explain why the missionaries paused in their journey when they had known the dangers facing them prior to leaving. This chronicle, the Fredegar chronicle, is as invaluable as Bede because it is the only reliable source which exists for the period it describes within Gaul.<sup>17</sup> According to the chronicler, an event destabilised the country around the time the missionaries had left Rome.<sup>18</sup>

The Fredegar chronicler writes that Childebert died four years after succeeding King Guntramn and, as Guntramn died on 28 March 593, the fourth year of Childebert's reign began in March 596.<sup>19</sup> The chronicler relates that after Childebert's death, 'his kingdom fell to his sons Theudebert (II) and Theuderic (II).'<sup>20</sup> As Gregory addresses Childebert's sons as kings within a letter composed on 23 July 596, it is safe to assume that Childebert's death occurred sometime between the 28 March and 23 July 596, a time when the missionaries would have been making their way to Provence.<sup>21</sup>

The succession of the Austro-Burgundian kingdom was not an easy transition as Theudebert and Theuderic were still children. According to the chronicler this resulted in political turmoil as the young King Chlothar (II), ruler of the Neustrian kingdom, was urged by his mother Fredegund to attempt to gain more land by attacking Theudebert and Theuderic's forces.<sup>22</sup> The conflict between Chlothar and Childebert's heirs seems to have resolved itself by 600 when Theuderic and Theudebert fought against Chlothar, resulting in the massacre of his army.<sup>23</sup> Defeated, Chlothar gave Theuderic 'all the land between the Seine and the Loire right to the Atlantic and the Breton frontier, while Theudebert had the entire duchy of Dentelin'.<sup>24</sup> Bede's ignorance of the Fredegar chronicle, the timing between the unrest in Merovingian Gaul and Augustine returning to Rome and the importance of support within Gaul to the missionaries, cannot be argued away as mere coincidence. It is likely the missionaries had heard of Childebert's death while in Provence and fearing the safety of their journey, sent Augustine back to Rome asking Gregory for guidance.

We will never know the precise route taken by the missionaries in Gaul, despite attempts by historians to do so, as Roger Collins and Judith McClure have pointed out the amount of existing letters today cannot be seen as a representation of the letters produced from the period.<sup>25</sup> They further argue that not all the letters which survive today should be seen as having a practical purpose.<sup>26</sup> Collins and McClure believe the death of Childebert destabilised the route the missionaries would take and that it was necessary for Augustine to return to Rome for a new batch of letters, addressing the new kings and a wider clergy in case the conflict caused any detours.<sup>27</sup>

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17 Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, ix.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, 10-11.

20 *Ibid.*, 11.

21 See Letters 6.53, 6.56 in Gregory and Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*.

22 Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 11-12.

23 *Ibid.*, 13.

24 *Ibid.*

25 One such attempt at determining their route has been made by Wood in 'The Mission of Augustine', 6. See also Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 29.

26 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 29.

27 *Ibid.*

Marilyn Dunn also believes that Augustine returned to Rome because of Childebert's death however, she believes Childebert was more involved in the mission than previously realised. She argues that Augustine's return to Rome after Childebert's death suggests a close relationship between Pope Gregory's decision to Christianise the English and the will of Childebert as it was only after his death that the missionaries hesitated to continue.<sup>28</sup> This link, according to Dunn, can be found through the rivalry between the Neustrian and Austro-Burgundian kingdoms. She argues that it was Childebert who initiated the mission to convert the English because Childebert's rival, King Chlothar, had political ties to the Kentish kingdom through the marriage of Bertha, a princess from the Neustrian kingdom, to Aethelberht, who was at this time the prince of Kent.<sup>29</sup> Childebert, in Dunn's view wanted to reduce Chlothar's influence over the channel.<sup>30</sup> Such an argument rests on the idea that the Neustrian kingdom ruled over Kent due to a marriage alliance between Bertha and Aethelberht. This marriage is mentioned by Bede in his *History of the English People*<sup>31</sup> and has been expanded upon further by Gregory of Tours in his *Histories*, as he knew Bertha's mother Ingoberga.<sup>32</sup>

Marriage between Merovingian royalty and foreigners was common, and such relationships have been organised by Ian Wood into two distinct categories. The first category concerns itself with high level alliances between royal families, for instance groups such as the Ostrogoths, Visigoths and the Lombards fall into this category.<sup>33</sup> These marriages involved the daughters of living kings and a significant dowry.<sup>34</sup> The second category, of which Bertha falls into, occurs between families of differing status.<sup>35</sup> The Frankish woman could be from the royal family if her father had passed away (as is the case with Bertha) or from an aristocratic family.<sup>36</sup> Such women, according to Wood, did not hold 'the greatest importance in Frankish circles.'<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to understand why such marriages took place when a daughter was sent to a foreign king, or in Bertha's case a foreign prince as the father or guardian would gain 'little material or political advantage.'<sup>38</sup>

A study on marriage alliances within the Merovingian kingdoms by Ryan Patrick-Crisp found that many foreign marriages were more commonly used as a form of 'competitive generosity,' defined as a gesture of generosity that increases a king's prestige against his rivals.<sup>39</sup> This resulted in more loyal followers rather than an alliance between two kingdoms.<sup>40</sup> Patrick-Crisp does not place Bertha's marriage within this category as he believes Bertha and Aethelberht's marriage gave the Merovingians authority over the Kentish kingdom, however I will argue later that Bertha's

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28 Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, 51.

29 *Ibid.*, 49.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 39.

32 Gregory and E. Brehaut, *History of the Franks*, (New York: Norton, 1969), 219. N. Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon myths: State and Church, 400-1066*, (London: Hambledon Press, 2000), fn. 62.

33 Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony', 239.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, 239.

38 R. Patrick-Crisp, 'Marriage and Alliance in the Merovingian Kingdoms 481-639,' (PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2003), 9.

39 *Ibid.*, 203, 8.

40 *Ibid.*

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marriage does fit within this category.<sup>41</sup> He further notes that ‘Frankish hegemony in England is fairly well accepted among scholars’, yet this statement is far from correct.<sup>42</sup> Frankish hegemony over England continues to be debated, despite the tenacity of historians who argue its existence.<sup>43</sup> One such historian who argues in favour of its existence and who specializes in the study of Merovingian Gaul is Ian Wood. It is his argument that the Franks held authority over England that has received attention in scholarly publications.<sup>44</sup> As it will soon be shown his argument rests on questionable interpretations from a small collection of literary evidence and that, contrary to Patrick-Crisp’s interpretation, Bertha and Aethelberht’s marriage may be an example of competitive generosity.

The earliest reference on Frankish hegemony over England can be found in Procopius’ sixth-century work *History of Wars*. As a historian and chronicler, he was concerned with the Byzantine Empire under Emperor Justinian.<sup>45</sup> In the *History of Wars* he writes:

The island of Brittia lies in this [the northern] ocean...and it is between Britannia and the island Thule...three very populous nations inhabit the island of Brittia, and one king is set over each of them...these nations are Angles, Frisians, and Britons who have the same name as the island...so great *apparently* is the multitude of these peoples that every year in large groups they migrate from there [Brittia] with their women and children and go to the Franks.<sup>46</sup>

This reference to ‘Brittia’ and ‘Britannia’ has caused confusion in the past, however in this instance Brittia is Britain, and Britannia is Brittany (otherwise known as Armorica).<sup>47</sup> The nations that ‘inhabit the island of Brittia,’ are described as independent from one another, each with their own king, but these should not be interpreted as three stable kingdoms, but rather as three different cultures.<sup>48</sup> According to Procopius, it is these nations that migrated to Frankish land. His use of ‘apparently’ however, shows he is unsure of the accuracy of such information. Procopius continues:

They [the Franks] are settling them in...[a] desolate part of their land, and as a result of this they say they are gaining possession of the island. So that not long ago the King of the Franks actually sent some of his friends to the Emperor Justinian in Byzantium, and despatched with them men of the Angles, claiming that this island [Brittia] too is ruled by him.<sup>49</sup>

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41 *Ibid.*, 206.

42 *Ibid.*

43 See Wood, ‘Frankish Hegemony’. The best argument against Frankish hegemony can be found in Collins and McClure, ‘Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow’.

44 Dunn, *Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons*, 49-51. D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings*, Rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2000). 27. Patrick-Crisp, ‘Marriage and Alliance’. 206.

45 A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3.

46 *Emphasis mine*. ‘History of Wars: 8.20.4-8’, translated by Thompson in E. A. Thompson, ‘Procopius on Brittia and Britannia’, *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1980), 498-500.

47 *Ibid.*, 498-9.

48 *Ibid.*, 499.

49 *Ibid.*, 500-1.

It is this statement that Wood sees as providing the strongest evidence for Merovingian hegemony over a portion of Britain.<sup>50</sup> However, following a close analysis of this passage Edward Thompson has found such an interpretation to be incorrect. Not only had Britain been, 'an island in which the Merovings [sic] had hitherto shown no interest', but the argument that the Frankish king could claim Britain for his own simply because of mass migration due to overcrowding, an explanation even Procopius is unsure of, is highly unusual and problematic.<sup>51</sup> It is doubtful such a claim was made as the Franks could not have maintained their hold over the strong warrior peoples of Britain and, as Thompson acknowledges, during this period the Franks were claiming hegemony over Brittany not Britain.<sup>52</sup> It is more likely that Procopius was confused between the similarities in the terms 'Brittia' and 'Britannia', and recorded the wrong country.

Since Clovis' death (the founder of the Merovingian kingdom), Merovingian kings had been claiming Brittany as part of their kingdom, and this was still occurring during the period Procopius was writing.<sup>53</sup> There is no evidence of any Frankish king claiming suzerainty over Britain. In fact when the Carolingians succeeded the Merovingians, their kings re-established control over territories that had submitted to Frankish hegemony in the past.<sup>54</sup> Britain was not one of these territories. Instead the Carolingians held diplomatic exchanges with the Anglo-Saxons, a contrast to the violent wars that had broken out across the Rhine as they re-established their authority.<sup>55</sup> Following this finding, Wood's strongest evidence for Frankish hegemony over Britain is in grave doubt. However his argument for Frankish hegemony does not rest solely on this account in Procopius' *History of Wars*, as letters composed by the Frankish King Theudebert I and Pope Gregory I respectively, have been interpreted as further proof of Frankish hegemony over Britain.

Theudebert I ruled over Austrasia in 534-47 and asserted his rule over the Eucii in a letter to Emperor Justinian in 538.<sup>56</sup> According to Wood, these Eucii are the Jutes from Kent or the Isle of Wight.<sup>57</sup> Such an explanation rests on the similarity of the pronunciation of the *Iuti* or the *Iutae* recorded by Bede as the inhabitants of Kent.<sup>58</sup> Recalling that Bede was writing well after the period in question, Procopius' account written during the sixth century named the inhabitants of Britain not as the Iuti, Iutae or the Eucii, but the Angli or the Angles.<sup>59</sup> Further, the context of the letter does not refer to Britain but to Brittany, those living east of the Rhine.<sup>60</sup> The second letter used by Wood to promote his theory was composed by Pope Gregory I writing to the young Frankish kings Theuderic II and Theudebert II, sons of the late Childebert. He said:

After almighty God honoured your kingdom with the true faith...we received from you plenty of evidence for believing that you really wanted your subjects to be converted to

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50 Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony' 235.

51 Thompson, 'Procopius on Brittia and Britannia' 501.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 502.

54 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 35.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 33.

57 Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony', 54.

58 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 33-4. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 27.

59 'History of Wars: 8.20.6' as translated by Thompson 499.

60 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 33.

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that faith, in that you are of course their kings and lords. And thus it has come to our attention that the people of England earnestly desire to be converted to the Christian faith, with God's compassion, but that the priests from nearby neglect them, and cease to inflame their demand with their encouragement.<sup>61</sup>

The priests mentioned are likely to be Frankish priests from Neustria, as they had contact with the Kentish kingdom, and Gregory knew nothing about the surviving British and Celtic Christians at this time.<sup>62</sup> Wood has interpreted this letter as claiming the 'subjects' of the Franks included the English.<sup>63</sup> However as Collins and McClure point out the words used by Gregory to link the two sentences, 'atque ideo/and in the same way' suggests a 'parallel' was being drawn, 'all good rulers would by definition seek the true religion for their subjects'.<sup>64</sup> Even if Procopius' passage within his *History of Wars* and the letters by Theudebert I and Pope Gregory could be strongly shown to support Woods' theory - it is clear they cannot - the scarcity of information supporting such a theory must be taken into account. Surely the Franks would have boasted about their authority over Britain to anyone of consequence as such an accomplishment would aid the Franks in asserting their authority over other peoples, and would place fear in any rivals considering an attack. Even the *supposed* evidence discussed cannot be seen to strongly support this., What the evidence can support is that the marriage between Aethelberht and Bertha may have taken the form of competitive generosity instead of a marriage alliance that resulted in Frankish hegemony.

The marriage between Bertha and Aethelberht does not follow the accepted pattern of foreign marriages in the Merovingian kingdoms. Bertha's status was higher than that of her husband's and this is shown by the fact that she did not have to convert to her husband's religion, an action which was expected by other Frankish princesses marrying into foreign courts.<sup>65</sup> As Bertha's father had died, she was subjected to the whimsy of her Uncle Chilperic who ruled over Soissons.<sup>66</sup> Chilperic's rivals, Guntramn and Sigibert I were strong leaders and the use of competitive generosity through the marriage of Bertha may have been designed to increase his prestige whilst getting rid of an unwanted niece. This explanation seems more plausible in light of Aethelberht's actions after the death of Chilperic in 584. Once Chilperic died, his kingdom fell to his infant son Chlothar II.<sup>67</sup> This weakened the kingdom as the guardianship of King Chlothar fell to Guntramn, a man wholly concerned with his own kingdom, resulting in a lack of leadership in Soissons.<sup>68</sup> It was during this time that Aethelberht emerged as the King of the Kentish people.<sup>69</sup> As Higham argues, 'it seems unlikely therefore, that the Kentish court was in any meaningful sense subordinate to either Soissons or Paris (Paris was the city Bertha's father had controlled), between the mid-580s and the mid-590s.'<sup>70</sup> Aethelberht was a strong king, his establishment of the first English laws, his large and successful domain, and the marriage alliance between his sister and Sledd of the East

61 Letter 6.51 in Gregory and Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, 438.

62 H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972), 59.

63 Wood, 'Frankish Hegemony', 235.

64 Collins and McClure, 'Rome, Canterbury and Wearmouth-Jarrow', 20-1.

65 Patrick-Crisp, 'Marriage and Alliance', 204.

66 I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751*, (London: Longman, 1994), 56-7.

67 N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings : Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1997), 71.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

Saxons resulted in a subordinate king, show Aethelberht was not easily subservient to others.<sup>71</sup> It is common when arguing for the existence of Frankish hegemony through the marriage of Bertha and Aethelberht that the strength of Aethelberht's reign is belittled or ignored. Information is always given which attests to the power of the Franks rather than the power of Aethelberht's kingdom. It is highly unlikely that Aethelberht was subordinate to the Franks because the evidence is simply not there. The theory of Frankish hegemony has risen in popularity because of biased interpretations of literary evidence coupled with a small amount of archaeological and linguistic sources which support interactions between the two peoples.

Geographically the civilisations were close, and an abundance of imported goods found within Kent shows commerce occurred rather than gift-exchange.<sup>72</sup> As well as this, Kentish archaeology finds seem to have been influenced by Frankish fashions, as seen with clothing accessories.<sup>73</sup> Before the missionaries crossed the channel they acquired Frankish interpreters at Pope Gregory's request so that a dialogue between the missionaries and Aethelberht could take place.<sup>74</sup> From this we can assume either that the language of the Kentish was similar to the Franks or that there was close enough contact between them for some Gauls to speak the Kentish language. In this instance the explanation as to why Gregory sent missionaries to England is the simplest, it was not due to Merovingian politics but because he wanted to.

Gregory was born into an unstable world.<sup>75</sup> Since 542, plagues had swept through Italy repeatedly.<sup>76</sup> Directly after Gregory's succession a plague had gone through Rome and, as Gregory led a procession to atone for the sins and faults of his people, eighty individuals fell down dead from the disease.<sup>77</sup> Plague was one of a multitude of problems, the Western part of the empire was under the control of Germanic rulers and so during the 590s the Lombard's were a constant threat to Rome.<sup>78</sup> In his *Homilies* on Ezekiel Gregory wrote:

On all sides we are surrounded by swords, on all sides we go in imminent fear of death. Some men return to us with their hands cut off, others have been captured or killed. I am forced now to hold my tongue from expounding because my soul is weary of this life.<sup>79</sup>

Gregory's role as Pope during this tumultuous time forced him into military and political spheres as he organised troops to defend Rome and its surrounds, and the Church funded the public finances to such an extent that Gregory called himself the 'treasurer' of Rome.<sup>80</sup> Despite his efforts Rome was crumbling before his very eyes as he wrote;

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71 M. Deanesly, 'The Court of King Aethelberht of Kent', in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1942), 101-2. D. Pelteret, 'Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, Vol. 9 (1980), 99. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 74.

72 B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, (London: Seaby, 1990), 39.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 39.

75 R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

76 *Ibid.*, 4.

77 J. Richards, *Consul of God: The Life and Times of Gregory the Great*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 42.

78 Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, 3.

79 Pope Gregory I, 'Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel', in Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity*, 55.

80 Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, 100.

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Towns are depopulated...churches burnt, monasteries and nunneries destroyed...no farmer dwells here now; wild beasts have taken the place of throngs of men...here, in the land in which we live, the world no longer announces its coming end, but shows it forth.<sup>81</sup>

Gregory's writings at this time were wholly concerned with the apocalypse, he prepared for the second coming by composing the *Regula Pastoralis* to ensure preaching and teaching continued vigorously.<sup>82</sup> The *Dialogues*, *Magna Moralia* and the *Homilies* were composed to help Christians 'reach the perfect state' for the second coming.<sup>83</sup>

Gregory had heard the Anglo-Saxons were desirous of conversion and wanted to save them in time for the second coming, a time which Gregory believed was imminent.<sup>84</sup> He chose to send Augustine and his fellow monks on the mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons as part of his preparation for this apocalypse. The English were not the only people Gregory tried to convert as his missionary zeal was used on the heathens in Sardinia and the Arian heretics.<sup>85</sup> The English mission must be seen in this context rather than the happenings of Merovingian Gaul. The coming apocalypse dictated Gregory's actions as seen in his letter to the newly converted Aethelberht:

Just as we perceive in Holy Scripture from the words of our almighty Lord, the end of the present world is now close at hand...do not feel at all disturbed, because these signs of the end of the world are sent ahead, for the reason that we ought to be worried about our souls, and uncertain over the hour of our death.<sup>86</sup>

His aim was not motivated by any desires made by Childebert in Merovingian Gaul, but to gain as many souls as he could for the second coming.<sup>87</sup>

Gregory's missionary zeal came from a place of pastoral protection and it is this worldview that must be focused on when determining the motive of the mission. The speculation that the Merovingian king, Childebert II initiated the mission is incorrect, as is the notion that the Kentish kingdom was subordinate to the Franks. The marriage between Aethelberht and Bertha should be seen as an example of 'competitive generosity', rather than a marriage alliance – and thus the argument in favour of Frankish hegemony over the Kentish kingdom loses its strongest asset. Simply because literature points towards a dialogue between the two peoples does not mean one dominated the other, and such a view has been given too much power within recent scholarship.

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81 Pope Gregory I, 'Dialogorum libri IV de miraculis partum italicorum', in *Ibid.*, 52.

82 Richards, *Consul of God*, 54.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Letter 6.51 in Gregory and Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, 438.

85 *Ibid.*

86 Letter 11.37 in Gregory and Martyn, *Letters of Gregory*, 782-4.

87 Richards, *Consul of God*, 54.