



On the Origin of the Pastoral Care | De origine Regulae pastoralis

Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | Latin

Period | 7th Century, 8th Century, 9th Century

Genre | History

Source | Oxford, St. John's College, MS 28

Collection | Writing History: Chronicles, Legends and Anecdotes; Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death: Global Medieval Perspectives

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Transcription, translation and introduction by Alexandra Reider.

Introduction to the Text

This short preface to Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis* (*Pastoral Rule* or *Pastoral Care*) offers an unusual account of the genesis of that text, composed—so the preface says—during travel that Gregory undertook through Gaul in an attempt to avoid becoming pope. By contrast, the standard narrative of the *Pastoral Care*'s origin sees it completed presumably in Rome, not long after Gregory's papal inauguration, and sent off thence to John, Bishop of Ravenna. (History supports the second version of events: Gregory was first in Constantinople, then Rome, prior to assuming the papacy.) Gregory's initial reluctance to become pope is a constant in both origin stories, however, even if he is more active in his escapism in the preface presented here. The tally noted in the preface extends Gregory's time in office by four months. He was pope from September 3, 590 to March 12, 604: thirteen years, six months (not ten months), and nine days. The etymology of Gregory's name is sound.

The preface also alludes to a second alternate history of the *Pastoral Care*, one that is introduced in a more displaced way: "And others think that..." This origin story is vague with its mentions of an "emperor of the Goths" and a "demented leader of the Romans," but these could be references to Justin II, Emperor of the Byzantine Empire (r. 565-74), and Leovigild, the Visigothic king with whom he contended. (Justin II notably suffered from mental illness.) This would place the text's purported composition sometime between 565 and 574; for context, Gregory entered monastic life in 574.

Introduction to the Source

To the best of my knowledge, this text has not been previously edited or translated. I have found it in two English manuscripts that were produced centuries apart and that bear no direct relation to one another: Oxford, St. John's College, MS 28 (s. x med. and x3/4 or x/xi; the *Pastoral Care* is in the slightly later part), fol. 6v and Oxford, Merton College, MS 16, (s. xiv ex., xv1), fol. 139va. The text must certainly exist in more manuscript witnesses of the *Pastoral Care*, from a range of times and—one assumes, given the text's continental origin—of places.

About this Edition

I have transcribed this text diplomatically from St. John's College, MS 28 and double-checked it against Merton College, MS 16. The two witnesses follow each other word-for-word except for two presumed misspellings: MS 16 reads *tritor* for *nutritor* and *plicipatum* for *principatum*. The only other differences are the spelling, punctuation and abbreviations used: a remarkable fixity, in view of the centuries between the two known versions. On my decision to translate *brigalis* as "Bruges": *brigalis* is described as a city in *gallia belgica* ("Belgian Gaul"), and Bruges was indeed settled by the late sixth century, so it would have been an option to a fleeing Gregory. But I have not found *brigalis* as an attested Latin term for "Bruges" (or indeed for anywhere else in Belgian Gaul). *Brigalis*, then, is either evidence of a further place-name for Bruges or a name of a different city.

I would like to thank the Lynne Grundy Memorial Trust for funding my travel within the UK to examine the Oxford manuscripts named here and the Scriptorium Working Group at Yale University for discussing this fascinating little text with me, as well as the team behind the *Global Medieval Sourcebook*.



Anonymous. "On the Origin of the Pastoral Care | De origine Regulae pastoralis". Trans. Alexandra Reider. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/origin_pastoral_care/.

Further Reading

Godden, Malcolm. "Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English Pastoral Care, and Their Carolingian Models." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 110, no. 4, 2011, pp. 441-73.

St. Gregory the Great. *The Book of Pastoral Rule*. Translated by George Demacopoulos. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007.

Neil, Bronwen and Matthew Dal Santo, editors. *A Companion to Gregory the Great*. Brill, 2013.



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Gregorius urbis romę æpiscopus hunc librum pastoralis curę scripsit pro excusatione episcoporum eo quod pelagius illius nutritor et romanę æcclesię princeps eum rogabat. ut post se episcopi locum tenuisset. et in gallia lugdunensi conscripsit huius libri incepta. et in gallia belgica consummata est id est in ciuitate que dicitur brigalis quia gregorius principatum uitare uolens in occidentales plagas gallorum fugerat. et alii putant quia imperatoris de gothis vel insani regis romanorum tempore hic liber conscriptus est in quo narrat gregorius opus esse difficile principatum æcclesię; Sanctus gregorius. annis. xiii. et. mensibus. x. et diebus. ix. rexit æcclesiam; Gregorius grece uigil latine. et a uerbo gregorio. iii. coniugationes. quia inuenitur gregorite id est uigilate.

Gregory, bishop of the city of Rome, wrote this book of pastoral care for the benefit of bishops because Pelagius, his mentor and head of the Roman church, asked that he take the place of bishop after him. And in Lyonnais Gaul he composed the beginnings of this book and in Belgian Gaul it was completed, that is, in the city that is called Bruges, because Gregory, wanting to avoid leadership, had fled to the western regions of Gaul. And others think that this book, in which Gregory recounts that leadership of the Church is difficult work, was begun at the time of the emperor of the Goths or of the demented leader of the Romans. St. Gregory ruled the Church for thirteen years and ten months and nine days. "Gregorius" in Greek means *vigil* in Latin,¹ and from the word "Gregorius" come three etymological connections because "gregorite" – that is, *vigilate*² – is found.

Critical Notes

- 1 *Vigil* = alert
- 2 *Vigilate* = you (pl.) watch