Neologisms in the Latin of Gregory of Tours

I will begin with some introductory remarks on the educational and linguistic background of Gregory of Tours, as this may throw some light on the type of neologisms we find in his work. Gregorius (or Georgius) Florentinus was born into an upper class, senatorial family in Clermont in the Auvergne in 538 AD. In these circles one can be almost certain that his mother tongue would have been Latin; nevertheless, he would have lived in a linguistically heterogeneous society in which the lower classes would still be Celtic speakers and Germanic would be the language of the new Frankish kings and their courts. Although Gregory would have received a basic grammatical and literary education, which would have included some of the classics of pagan literature such as Virgil, his main reading would have been Christian Latin, including most prominently Jerome and the earlier Latin Bible translations. He was living at a time when grammatical training in Latin was in decline and in the preface to his *History of the Franks*, as often elsewhere, he admits to his own incompetence in matters of orthography (*in litteris*), morphology (*in syllabis*) and syntax (*grammaticam artem*):

*Franc. prae*. I sed prius ueniam legentibus precor, si aut in litteris aut in syllabis grammaticam artem excessero, de qua adplene non sum inbutus; illud tantum studens, ut quod in ecclesia credi praedicatur sine aliquo fuco aut cordis haesitatione retineam, quia scio peccatis obnoxium per credulitatem puram obtinere posse ueniam apud deum.

In fact many examples of neologisms in his work turn out simply to be non-standard forms of already existing lexical items. Such forms probably reflect the common Latin usage of his circle at the time and are unlikely, in most cases, to have been invented by Gregory himself. He is not a great creator of words in the tradition, say, of Jerome, but it will nevertheless prove possible to isolate one or two features which appear to be characteristic of his own idiolect.

Anyone working on the language of Gregory of Tours over the last century has had to take as his starting point the magnificent work of Max Bonnet (1890). In the section of this work entitled *Addenda Lexicis* (pp. 193-202) Bonnet lists some 79 items as follows:

adintegre, adplene, adpraesens, adsemen, afflagitare, agnafus, agneus, anax, basilicaris, candelula, castaneus, casubla (*u.l. casubula*), cereferale, chrismarium, circummanens, circumstitus, circumurere, condecibilis, conhibentia, corallis, coturnosus, crumelum, deliberare, demancatus, elitate, excommunio, exorcizatio, facietergium, fenestellula, forasmuraneus, garrulatio, glorificator, hebitas, hortellus, ictuatus, infor-
mito, inframuraneus, intramuraneus, iniquiter, infringescere, iuuenulus, leudis, maleficare, martyrarius, medicicare, metallocrystallinus, mollimen, monachulus, mussula, numismatus, obserator, oratoriolum, ossulum, pagensis, parastrama, pascuaria, patenula, peraccedere, perlustrator, perpatescere, proclinus, profuxus, profunditudo, psallentium, puericellus (u.l. puricellus), redebere, replementum, republicare, respector, reuinctio, rubiola, submontanus, supertegulum, temporius, tripudiabilis, triumphabiliter, uelulum, uiritariolum, uoluclum.

Bonnet is the first to admit that many of the words listed could in fact have occurred earlier but that gaps in the lexical knowledge of his time could have obscured their date of first appearance.

When his list is checked against modern databases the results show that some 17 of these, roughly 25% of the total, had in fact occurred earlier, as follows:


The most common earlier sources, as might be expected, are the so-called Itala (pre-Jerome) Bible translations, Jerome and Gregory’s friend and contemporary, Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers.

One of the items on Bonnet’s list, conhibentia, is not really a new word at all, but simply reflects a colloquial Latin pronunciation and spelling of the more commonly occurring Christian Latin term coniuentia, equivalent to the Classical Latin uenia “favour”. The confusion of b and v reflected in Gregory’s spelling is a common feature of the spoken Latin of his time,1 although its true frequency in Gregory is difficult to gauge, as it is often corrected by scribes and editors.

Having excluded these 18 cases we are left with a total of 61 words from Bonnet’s list, which, whether invented by Gregory or not, are, until further evidence proves us wrong, attested for the first time in his work and it is to these that we now turn our attention.

1 Vaananen pp. 51, 59.
mussula (glor. conf. 43 x2 u.l. muscus, musculus) < mussa uox germ. i.q. muscus.
oratoriolum (uit. patr. 11.1) < oratorium
ossulum (Mart. 2.43; 4.15) < ossum < os for CL ossiculum (cf. ossiculum at
Franc. 7.31)
patenula (glor. conf. 22)
puercellus (Mart. 4.29 x2 u.l. puricellus) < puer
uelulum (f. 20 u.l. uillolus, uellulus) < uelum
uiridariolum (glor. conf. 23) < uiridarium
uoluclum (Franc. 3.15 u.l. uolucrum) < uoluo? total 12

This is an area where Gregory’s inventiveness shows itself to be particularly
creative. A number of the diminutives are formed according to strict classical
rules, but others display variation on these norms, reflecting the general
linguistic uncertainty of his times. This is an area where the morphology of
native speakers may have been more distant from classical norms than that of
those who had to learn the rules of Latin as a second language. In most cases
we are not dealing in Gregory with the well-known late and colloquial Latin use
of diminutive forms as an equivalent of the original noun, with no change in
meaning, e.g. auricula2 for auris or agnellus3 for agnus, where the diminutive
forms become the roots of all the Romance reflexes. Gregory, despite his many
and obvious uncertainties in matters of morphology and syntax, is nevertheless
a conscious stylist and is careful in most cases to use diminutive forms with full
diminutive force. As a native speaker of Latin he would also have had an intu­
itive feeling for the types of formation available for word building. In Classical
Latin the regular diminutive formation from first and second declension nouns
is in -ellus, -ella, -ellum, e.g. digitulus, ianula, oppidulum.4 A number of the
diminutives listed above as occurring in Gregory for the first time conform to
this rule, as, for example, candelula and uelulum.

The form mussula occurring twice at glor. conf. 43 of a small mossy plant
growing on a gravestone and used for medicinal purposes is a slightly different
case. It is not derived from the Classical muscus “moss”, for which the diminu­
tive would be musculus, both of which forms are found as variae lectiones in
the present passage, but from the Germanic equivalent mussa. This could then
be an example of Frankish influence on Gregory’s lexicon, perhaps encouraged
in this case by the fact that the form musculus, as diminutive of mus, would
have been better known at the time with the meaning “muscle”, for which it
becomes the main root in Romance.5

At glor. conf. 22 the form patenula is again irregular. In Classical Latin first
and second declension nouns with roots in l, n and r would form their diminu­
tives in -ellus, -ella, -ellum,6 e.g. asinus > assellus, columna > columella. The
regular Classical diminutive from patina/patena (both forms are found) was

---

2 Meyer-Lübke nr. 793.
3 Meyer-Lübke nr. 284.
4 Leumann p. 305.
5 Meyer-Lübke nr. 5772.
6 Leumann p. 305.
patella. This form does not occur in Gregory. In the case of fenestellula we have a double diminutive. The regular first diminutive would be fenestella, a form which occurs in Gregory at Mart. 27. It could well be that by Gregory’s time fenestella had lost its diminutive force so that a doubling of the diminutive marker was made necessary. At uit. patr. 19 the diminutive form iuuenulus is used to express sympathy for the suffering of a youth “ponens remedium super alium iuuenuli”. The regular Classical diminutive was iuuenculus, as -culus, -a, -um is the regular diminutive formation with third, fourth and fifth declension nouns, e.g. ensis > ensiculus, nautis > nauicula. The Classical form iuuenculus does not occur in Gregory, but the variant reading iuuenis in one manuscript suggests that Gregory’s form iuuenulus was perhaps unfamiliar to the scribe. One possible motivation for Gregory’s adoption of this second declension formation with a third declension noun could be his wish to avoid confusion with the diminutive of iuuenicus “bullock” which would also give iuuenculus. In fact iuuenicus and its diminutives do go on to supply Romance words for “young man”. 8

The diminutive monachulus, formed regularly from the Greek loan-word monachus, occurs for the first time in Gregory. In the context at uit. patr. 20.3 it is used in the pejorative sense of an “evil little monk” cum aliquid de illius monachuli litem ... habuisset. The Romance diminutives, e.g. Fr. monachelle (a type of fish) and moineau “sparrow”, are derived from a posited second diminutive monachellus. 9 Two further regular formations, occurring in Gregory for the first time, are oratoriolum “a little oratory” and uiridariolum “a little garden” from oratorium and uiridarium on the model of pallium > palliolum.

The case of ossulum is an interesting one. In both occurrences the reference is to the bones of a starving child, e.g. Mart. 4.15 pellis tenuis, qui eius ossula contegeret. In Classical Latin the regular diminutive was ossiculum, the -culum termination being the regular one for third, fourth and fifth declension nouns, as we saw above with iuuenculus. In fact Gregory uses both forms, with ossiculum occurring at Franc. 7.31 diuisum in tribus partibus ossiculum. In Late and colloquial Latin the second declension form ossum -i n. replaces the third declension os, ossis 10 and it is perhaps from this second declension form that Gregory’s diminutive ossulum is derived, according to Classical rules for second declension -ulum diminutives.

The form puericellus “a little boy” is again something of an anomaly. The original diminutive of puer, extant only in Early Latin, is puellus, the regular contracted form of second declension -r stem nouns and adjectives, cf. miser > misellus, tener > tenellus. 11 The -cellus ending, a secondary derivation from -culus, ought to be restricted to third, fourth and fifth declension forms such as auis > auicella, mollis > mollicella. The initial -i in -icus, -icellus spread

---

8 MEYER-LÜBKE nr. 4640, 4641.
9 MEYER-LÜBKE nr. 5654.
10 VÄÄNÄNEN pp. 110, 111, 114.
from -i stem nouns of the type ensis > ensiculus to consonant stems, e.g. pes > pediculus. So in Gregory’s puericellus we have a third declension diminutive ending applied to a second declension noun. In Christian Latin roughly contemporaneous with Gregory the double diminutive form puericellulus is found. In puericellus, then, Gregory was simply perhaps following the fashion of his time rather than inventing something completely new.

Finally there is some uncertainty about the meaning of uoluclum at Franc. 3.15. If in fact, as the context suggests, it means something like “little package” from uoluo in the sense “wrap up” then the -clum termination is more likely to be a deverbal suffix, originally -tlom in IE, found in such words as pocolum or uolucra, the latter also from uoluo of a caterpillar that wraps itself up in vine leaves.

2. Other nouns

anax (lul. 8)
castaneus (glor. mart. 73) for CL castanea
cereferale (glor. conf. 78)
crumelum (glor. conf. 96) cf. grumulum
excommunio (uit. patr. 17.1) for CL excommunicatio
exorcizatio (uit. patr. 4.4) (cf. exorcismus at Franc. 7.44, glor. mart. 23)
garrulatio (glor. mart. 12; 25)
hebitas (lul. 2)
mollimen (uit. patr. 19.2 u.l. mollitiem) for CL mollimentum
obserator (uit. patr. 7.2 u.l. observatores, observantes)
parastroma (Franc. 6.20)
pascuaria (lul. 17)
perlustrator (Franc. 1.10)
profuxus (Mart. 2)
profunditudo (Franc. 6.26) for CL profunditas
psallentium (Franc. 1.48)
replementum (in psalm. p. 874.6) cf. CL complementum
respector (Franc. 10.8)
reuintio (uit. patr. 11)
rubeola (stell. 20)
supertegulum (Franc. 5.50) total 21

Two verbal nouns in -men and -mentum namely mollimen “softening” from mollio and replementum “fulfilment” from repleo illustrate the stylised nature of Gregory’s innovations. In Late Latin it is the -mentum suffix which remains productive, while -men is restricted to a few stylised variant forms for already existing -mentum types. So in Gregory’s case mollimen replaces molli-

---

12 Leumann p. 306.
13 Leumann p. 306.
mentum, the Classical form attested for example in Pliny the Elder. Once again the uaria lectio mollitiem at uit.patr. 19.2 suggests the scribe’s unfamiliarity with Gregory’s new form.

The form replementum “fulfillment”, equivalent to the Classical complementum reflects the widening of the range in Late Latin of the re- prefix. Two further examples from the above list further illustrate this feature: reuinctio “captive” from uincio, for which the Classical form was the simple uinctio, without prefix, as attested in Varro; and respector “spectator” for Classical spectator.

Two nouns in -atio illustrate the productivity of this nominal suffix at the expense of others in Late Latin. Gregory’s exorcizatio “exorcism” in place of the Classical exorcismus is perhaps modelled on baptizatio, also from a Greek root. In fact the Classical form also occurs on two occasions in Gregory (Franc. 7.44, glor. mart. 23). Here, as often in Gregory, we have evidence of a language in flux, with variant forms of the same word, one well established, the other a neologism, existing side by side. The second -atio form is garrulatio, used twice in glor. mart. (12 and 25) of the senseless chatter of heretics, in place of the Classical garrulae. But against this extension of -atio terminations we can set Gregory’s excommunio at uit. patr. 17.1 for the Classical excommunicatio, not found in Gregory.

Adjectival abstracts in -tas and -tudo are found in hebitas “stupor” and profunditudo “depth”. At lul. 2 Gregory uses hebitas < hebes on the model perhaps of sospitas from sospes. There is no earlier Latin alternative for this form. In the case of profunditudo Gregory’s new form is an alternative to the Classical profunditas.

The remaining nouns in the list will be examined quickly in their alphabetical order: anax must be some kind of container, like a bucket, as appears from its context at lul. 8 pateram et urceum, qui anax dicitur. The qui ... dicitur phrase would be appropriate in introducing a little-known technical term, perhaps derived from the Greek αὐαεί meaning something like “king size”, on the analogy of modern terms like jeroboam.

castaneus, as a feminine noun meaning “chestnut tree”, in place of the Classical castanea, looks like a confusion between the noun and its adjectival derivative castaneus, -a, -urn.

crumelum is of uncertain origin. The most probable connection is with grumulum, a type of vegetable, similar to the heart of a cabbage. This meaning would certainly fit the context at glor. conf. 96 uel holus uel crumelum coctum, although it is possible that holus has crept into the text from a gloss on the unfamiliar term.

obserator is an agent noun, like perlustrator and respector. It refers to a man who locks doors < obsero. Again the new and unusual form leads to the presence of the uariae lectiones observatores and observantes.

15 SITTLE p. 286.
NEOLOGISMS IN THE LATIN OF GREGORY OF TOURS

parasi ruma refers to a type of tent. It is not strictly a neologism, but rather a loan-word from Greek, which occurs for the first time in Gregory.

pascuaria refers to a tax on pasture and is based on the continually productive -arius termination.

psallentium used of a song sung in Christian contexts, again from a Greek root. The word starts to become common in the time of Gregory and the fact that its first recorded occurrence is in Gregory could simply be an accident.

rubeola is the name of a star of reddish colour. The word should perhaps more properly be grouped with the diminutive forms.

supertegulum “roof top” illustrates a type of neologism which is particularly characteristic of Gregory, consisting of a preposition + noun or adjective. This leads on to the next category of neologism, adjectives, where this type is particularly common.

3. Adjectives

adpraesens (glor. conf. 94)
agnafus (glor. conf. 20; 34) < ἀγναφός = inpolitus
agneus (uit. patr. 8 pr.) for CL agninus
basilicaris (Iul. 16; glor. mart. 96)
condecibilis (Franc. 5.39) cf. Gloss. congruum: condecibilis, conuenientius
coturnosus (cotorn-) (Iul. 31; uit. patr. 1.3) < cothurnus
demancatus (Franc. 7.15)
forasmuraneus (Franc. 5.11)
icтуatus (Franc. 6.35) cf. Gloss III 601.41 -i qui loqui non possunt uel membra inclinare; 604.39 paralyticus: -us
inframuraneus (Franc. 7.22) confusion for intra-
intramuraneus (Franc. 2.34; uit. patr. 7.3)
metallocristallinus (Mart. 4.10)
numismatus (Franc. 4.40; 42; 5.18)
pagensis (Franc. 8.18) cf. M-L 6145 page(n)sis: fr. pays, cat. pagès, etc.
proclinus (Mart. 3.14)
submontanus (uit. patr. 20.4)
tripudiabilis (glor. mart. 6) total 17

Adjectives based on prepositional prefixes seem to be a feature of Gregory’s idiolect. Three of these forms are built on murus: so forasmuraneus, inframuraneus and intramuraneus. The form adpraesens is simply an emphatic version of praesens. The emphatic ad prefix, also found in Gregory’s adverbs adintegre and adsemel is a common feature of Late Latin, as exemplified by such forms as Jerome’s adplene mentioned above (p. 62). Compounds in con- also contribute to Gregory’s neologisms, as with condecibilis “suitable” which is also to be found in a Late Latin gloss on congruum.

16 VAAJÄNEN pp. 99-100.
A second group of adjectival neologisms is formed by verbal adjectives in -atus: demancatus < de + manus (= truncatus), ictuatus “paralysed” for Classical ictus and numismatus “minted” of money.

The compound adjective metallocristallinus, ultimately derived from Greek, looks like something out of Pliny the elder, but in fact occurs first in Gregory. Once again chance could have played a role in the late attestation of this word. Another, less common, Greek loan-word is agnafus in the sense of “unwashed” and used of false promises backed up with ragged robes pignora palleis agnafis exornata (glor. conf. 20); basilicaris “pertaining to the Christian basilica” is simply a Greek-based Christian technical term. A more learned Greek-based adjective is coturnosus from the tragic boot cothurnus. The Classical Latin form is cothurnatus, referring to a tragic or lofty style. In Gregory it seems to undergo a change of meaning as well as of form, with the sense of “arrogant” when applied to men at uit. patr. 1.3 uiri coturnosi atque elati, or “fierce” of bulls at Jul. 31 udimus coturnosos tauros.

The adjective agenus in uit. patr. 8 pr. agneo decoratos uellere is used in place of the Classical agninus. For the productivity of these -eus types in Gregory we can compare castaneus above.

Given its importance in later Romance it is surprising to find the adjective pagensis “belonging to a particular pagus or district” occurring for the first time in Gregory. This must be the result of pure lexicographical chance and it seems very unlikely that the word would have been invented by him.

proclinus at Mart. 3.14 is used of a sick man who falls flat on his face and is unable to get up again and is derived from proclinare on the analogy of inclinus from inclinare. In this instance it could have been invented by Gregory to provide a variation on inclinatus and incuruus used in the same passage.

Finally tripudiabilis at glor. mart. 6 “marvellous” is derived from the learned tripudium “favourable omen” found in Cicero. This -bilis termination found in the adjectives condecibilis and tripudiabilis is also productive with adverbs, as in the Gregorian neologism triumphabiliter for Classical triumphaliter “triumphantly”.

4. Adverbs

adintegre (Mart. 4.22)
adsemel (Franc. 4.31)
triumphabiliter (Mart. 2.60) for CL triumphaliter
temporiuie (Franc. 5.45) for CL tempestiuie total 4

The adverb triumphabiliter is discussed above as are (p. 67) adsemel and adintegre.

The use of temporiuie in the sense of Clasical tempestiuie is to be explained by the movement in sense of tempestas in Late Latin from, “time”, “season” to “storm”. The new form of the adverb temporiuie in the sense “in a timely
manner” thus avoids any ambiguity that the shift in the meaning of *tempestas* might have occasioned.

5. Verbs

afflagitare (*Franc. 6.29 u.l. flag- efflag-*)
elitare (*glor. mart. 80*)
inrigescere (*glor. mart. 52 ; Iul. 19 ; Mart. 4.2*) for CL derigescere
medicicare (*Mart. praef. p. 585,33 ; Franc. 4.25 ; 41 ; 8.29. uit. patr. 19.3*)
perpatescere (*Franc. 5.18*)
redibere (*Franc. 3.25*) for CL debere
republicare (*Franc. 2.3*) total 7

All the verbs occurring for the first time in Gregory, apart from *medicare* in the sense of “poison”, are based on adding a prepositional prefix to frequently occurring Classical forms, or, as in the case of *inrigescere* for Classical *derigescere* “grow stiff”, on changing the normal prefix. The category of verbs is thus not a productive one for Gregory and the so-called neologisms follow a well-established Late Latin preference for prefixed forms.

In conclusion we may say that the neologisms found in Gregory are those one would expect in the work of an author of his time, whose native language is Latin, who is well acquainted with the basics of Latin word-formation, but whose grasp of formal phonology and morphology reflects the fluid state of the language at his time, especially the more colloquial aspects of Christian Latin. It is unlikely that the majority of words that are attested for the first time in Gregory were actually invented by him.

Bibliography


Robert Maltby
School of Classics
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT