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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses and compares the representations of elite women in the writings of Bede (c.673-735) and Gregory of Tours (c.538-594), primarily in their histories: Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and Gregory's *Decem Libri Historiarum*. Bede's and Gregory's representations of women have never been compared in a dedicated full-length study, but comparing their differences and similarities can provide valuable insights into the authors' attitudes towards women and into other key, related issues in their narratives. Bede had read Gregory's history, and this thesis, which prioritises Bede, uses Gregory's history to better understand Bede's concerns. It identifies and investigates common themes in their treatment of secular and religious women. In relation to secular women, the thesis examines the theme of marriage and conversion to Christianity. For religious women, the thesis explores accounts of good behaviour, virginity and religious leadership, and accounts of bad behaviour involving scandal in religious life, sin and punishment. In order to fully understand Bede's and Gregory's representations of women, the thesis examines the authors' contemporary circumstances and their historiographical and exegetical contexts, with particular reference to providential and eschatological frameworks.

This thesis challenges the view that Bede's representation of women was motivated by misogyny or a degree of gendered prejudice. It argues that though writing in patriarchal societies, both Bede's and Gregory's representations of women were primarily driven by pastoral rather than gendered considerations. Bede and Gregory used representations of women (and men) to encourage contemporary moral reform and save souls in the last age of this world. Their message of reform was aimed at both women and men. Bede's and Gregory's histories are very different in tone, and depict women in different ways and in different situations, but their representations of women had a similar urgent positive pastoral function in both authors' narratives.