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Gregory of Tours

*The History of the Franks*



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*The History of the Franks of*

**GREGORY OF TOURS**

(c. 538-594)



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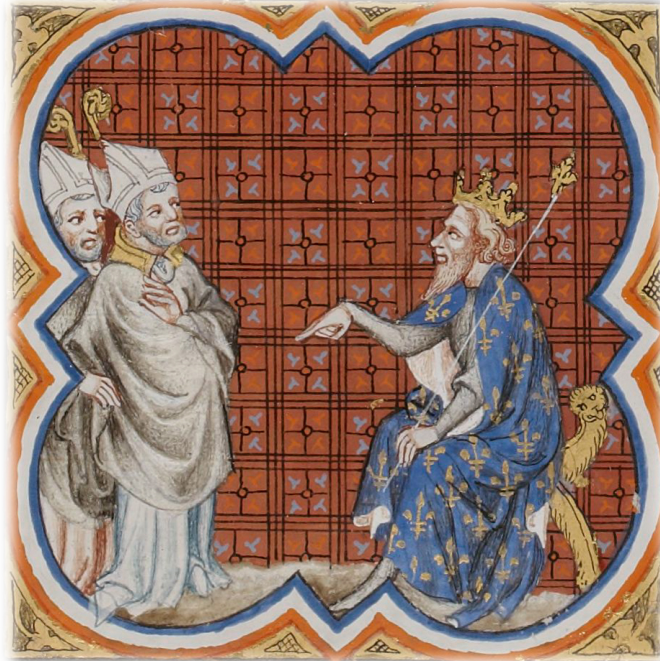
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**GREGORY OF TOURS**



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*The History of the Franks by Gregory of Tours*



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## The Translation



*Clermont-Ferrand, a city in central France — Gregory was born in Clermont, in the Auvergne region of central Gaul.*

## The History of the Franks (c. 592)



Translated by O. M. Dalton, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1927

Gregory of Tours, the father of French history, was born in c. 538 in Clermont, in the Auvergne region of central Gaul. His family formed part of the upper stratum of Gallo-Roman society. He was the son of Florentius, Senator of Clermont, and his wife Armentaria II, niece of Bishop Nicetius of Lyon and granddaughter of both Florentinus, Senator of Geneva, and Saint Gregory of Langres. Also, several of his relatives held the Bishoprics of Tours, Lyon and Langres. Gregory's paternal grandmother, Leocadia III, descended from Vettius Epagathus, the illustrious martyr of Lyon.

His father died while Gregory was young and his mother moved to Burgundy, where she held property. Gregory went to live with his paternal uncle, St. Gallus, bishop of Clermont, under whom, and his successor St. Avitus, he received a formal education. In his youth, Gregory contracted a serious illness and made a visit of devotion to the tomb of Saint Martin at Tours. Upon his recovery, he pursued a clerical career and was ordained deacon by Avitus. Upon the death of St. Euphronius, Gregory was selected as bishop by the clergy and people, who had been impressed by his piety, learning and humility. Their deputies overtook him at the court of King Sigebert of Austrasia and, being compelled to acquiesce much against his will, Gregory was consecrated by Giles, bishop of Rheims, on 22 August 573, at the age of thirty-four.

He spent the majority of his career at Tours, although he assisted at the council of Paris in 577. The world in which he lived was on the cusp between the Western culture of late antiquity and the sweeping changes of early-medieval Europe. Gregory was also influenced by the Frankish culture of the Merovingians to the north and the Gallo-Roman way of life in southern Gaul. Tours was situated on the Loire, linked by five Roman roads; the city was on the main route between the Frankish north and Aquitania, with Spain beyond. As the centre for the popular cult of Saint Martin, Tours was an important pilgrimage site, with a notable hospital, while offering a political sanctuary for prominent leaders to flee to during periods of violence and turmoil in Merovingian politics. Throughout his career, Gregory struggled with personal relations with four Frankish kings, Sigebert I, Chilperic I, Guntram, and Childebert II, and he personally knew most of the leading Franks.

He wrote his works in Late Latin, which frequently departs from Classical usage in both syntax and spelling, although there are relatively few changes in inflection. His most prominent text is his great *History of the Franks*, which is densely written for its time, weaving numerous narratives and characters. It contains Christian tales of miracles, descriptions of omens and natural events, stories of Christian martyrs, dialogues of church debates, discussions of the lives of holy men, nobility, and eccentric peasants, frequent Bible verses and references, and complex explorations of the international relations between numerous tribes and nations, including the Lombards, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Huns.

Written in the latter years of Gregory's life, *Historia Francorum* is comprised of ten books. Books I to IV initially recount the world's history from the Creation (as was traditional for such works), but the text moved quickly on to the Christianisation of Gaul, the life and times of Saint Martin, the conversion of the Franks and the

conquest of Gaul under Clovis I, and the more detailed history of the Frankish kings down to the death of Sigebert I in 575. At this date, Gregory had been bishop of Tours for two years.

The first book opens with Gregory's pronouncement that he is a Frankish Catholic clergyman that follows the Nicene Creed and abhors heresy like those of the "wicked" Arian sect. The narrative begins with a brief epitome of the biblical Old Testament and New Testament, and the subsequent spread of the Christian religion into Gaul. The book concludes with the death of Saint Martin of Tours in 397.

The second Book details the beginnings of the Merovingian dynasty, including King Clovis I's conversion to Christianity by his wife Clotilde, ending with his death in 511, after his conquest of large tracts of land in modern-day France. Book III concerns the four sons of Clovis, who equally divide the land after their father's death. These four kings, Theuderic I, Chlothar I, Childebert I, and Chlodomer, quarrel and fight for supremacy over the Frankish realm. Eventually, Chlothar becomes the most powerful king. After the death of Theuderic I in 534, Book III culminates with the death of his son and successor Theudebert I. Theudebert's kingdom is inherited by Theudebald until his own death in 555.

The fourth Book concerns the last years of Clothar's life, when the entire realm of the Franks is ruled by him. At the time of his demise in 561 (as under Clovis before him), the kingdom is divided equally between four sons of Clothar: Charibert I, Sigebert I, Guntram, and Chilperic I; of course, they quarrel for control of the entire realm. A truce between them is maintained until after the death of Charibert I in 567. Clothar's remaining sons fight for the supremacy, with Sigibert displaying the strongest military force.

From Book V onwards, the author clearly possesses more personal knowledge about the events he discusses. The later books are considerably longer and more detailed, while covering a shorter amount of time. The fifth book also contains Gregory's impressions of ecclesiastical issues he witnessed and had some bearing on. It also introduces Childebert II, the son of recently slain Sigibert and of the still-living Brunhilda. In Book VI, the young Childebert betrays his alliance with his adoptive uncle Gunthram, who had protected Childebert and his mother after his father Sigibert's death. Now, Childebert forms an alliance with his uncle, Chilperic, who had often been an enemy of Sigibert. In the seventh Book, Fredegund assumes regency for her young son Clothar II. He will be king of all Franks until his death in 629 — beyond Gregory's narrative, which ends in roughly 593. Fredegund and her son are under the protection of Gunthram. She remains in power until her death in 597.

Book VIII opens with the travels of Guntram to Paris and Orleans, describing numerous confrontations between the king and several bishops. Meanwhile, Guntram becomes ill and fears for his life. Gregory suggests that the king's illness is a just punishment since he is planning to send a great number of bishops into exile. Book IX concerns the Treaty of Andelot, which is signed in 587 between Guntram, Brunhilda, and Childebert II. It is a close pact of alliance, wherein Childebert is formally adopted as Guntram's heir. Brunhilda also formally allies with Guntram and comes under his protection. The final book is set in c. 589 and explains how Basina, the daughter of Chilperic I and Clotilda, leads a brief revolt from a nunnery.

Gregory's work reveals much about the changes in the Latin language of his time. Although there are problems in differentiating the exact grammar and orthography used by him from that used by his copyists, his writing differed radically from classical Latin in spelling and case endings. Gregory was aware of these differences, but explains that his mother convinced him that his style would make his writings

accessible to a wider readership. Certainly, Gregory is a vivid teller of tales and his writings are far from artless. Beneath their idiosyncratic grammar and style, they are carefully constructed and rhetorically sophisticated, conveying profound religious and spiritual messages. The first comprehensive history of the French people, *Historia Francorum* provides invaluable insight into the political life of the early Middle Ages and it remains the chief sixth-century source text for studying the Merovingian kingdom of the Franks.

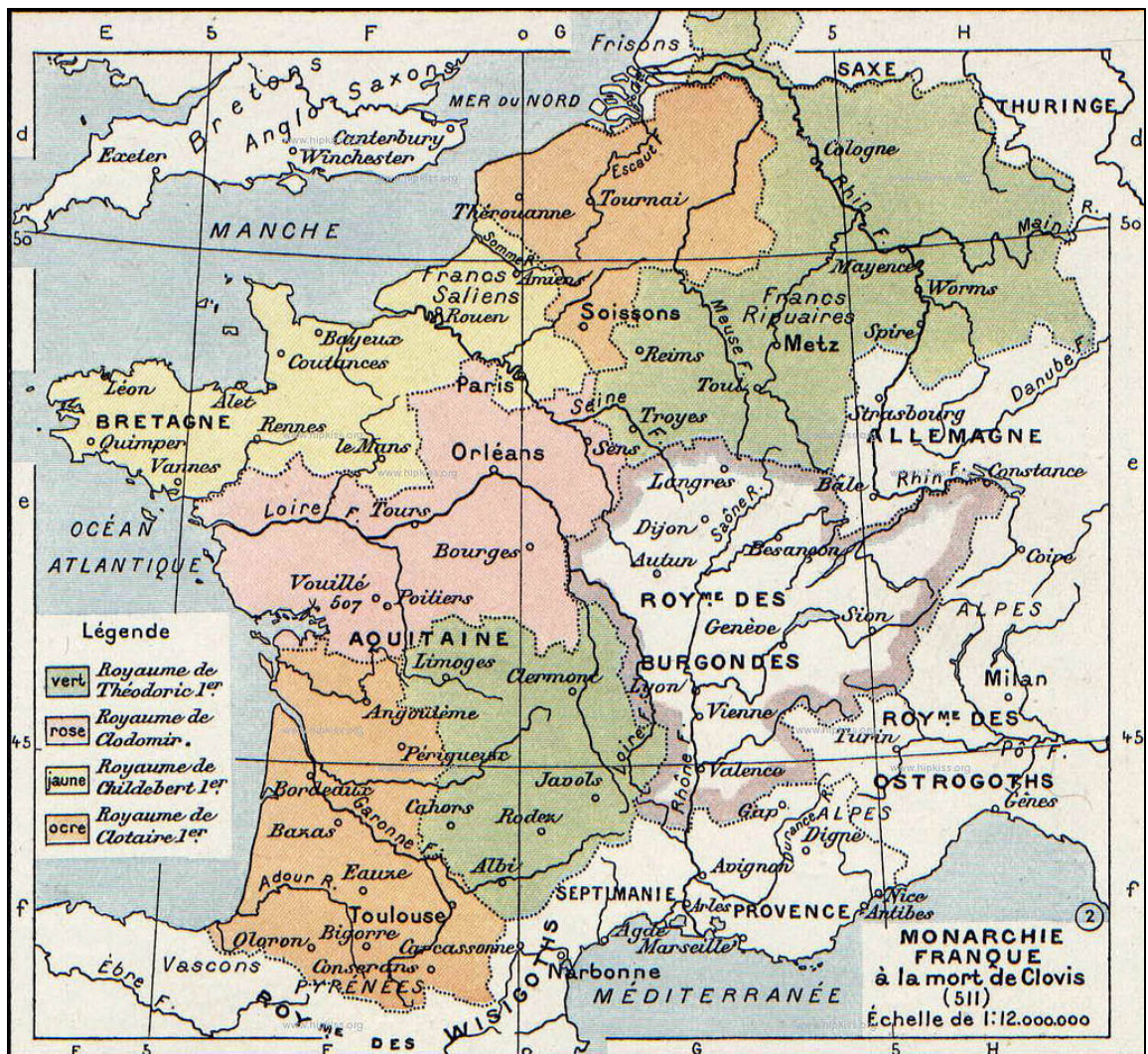




*Baptism of Clovis I, as depicted on an ivory book cover from c. 870. A principal figure of Gregory's history, Clovis (c. 466-511) was the first king of the Franks to unite his people, changing the form of leadership from a group of petty kings to rule by a single king, while ensuring that the kingship was passed down to his heirs.*



*Conquests of Clovis between 481 and 511*



Realms of Merovingian Gaul at the death of Clovis in 511



*'Clovis I Leading the Franks to Victory in the Battle of Tolbiac' by Ary Scheffer, 1836*

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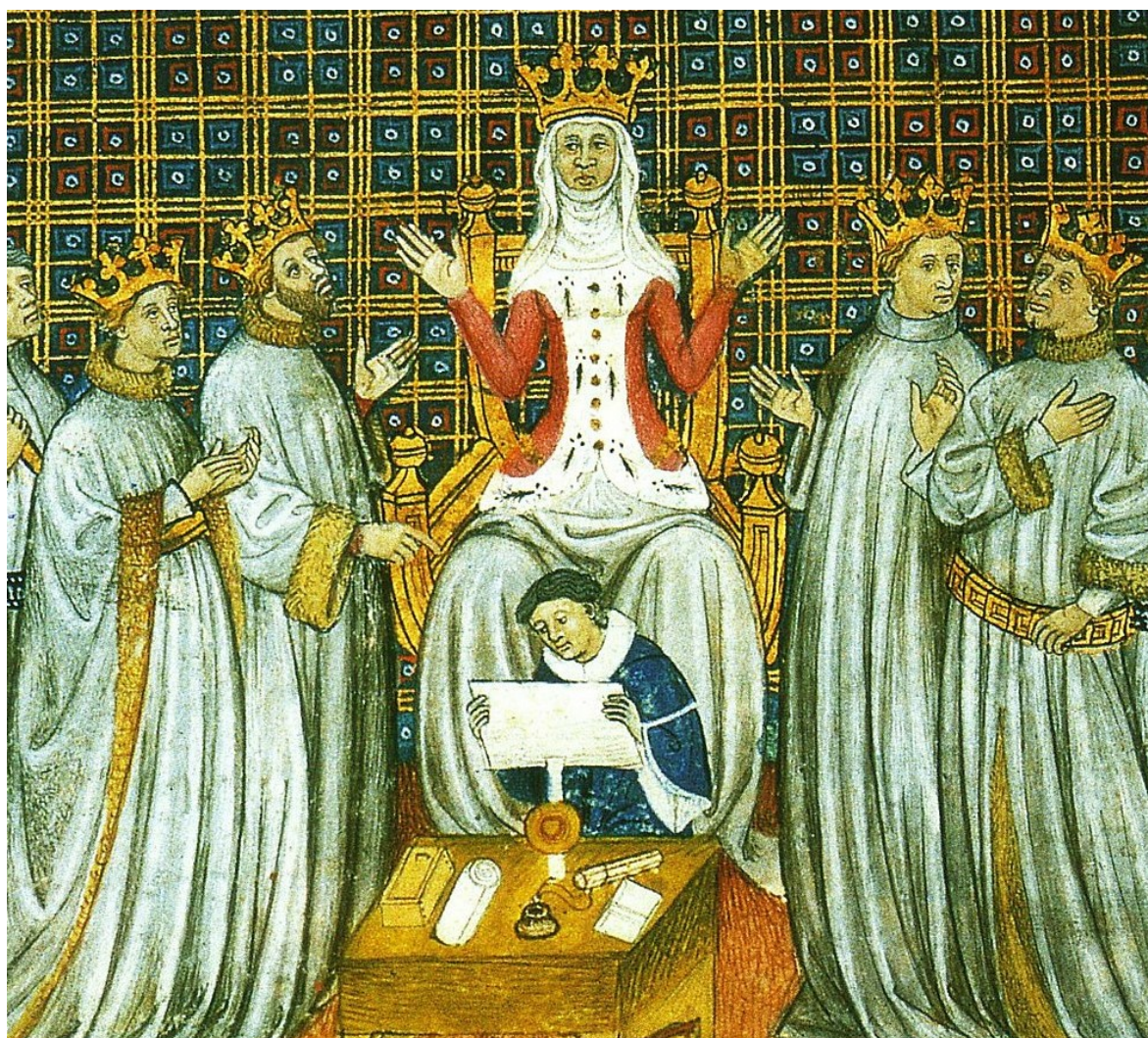
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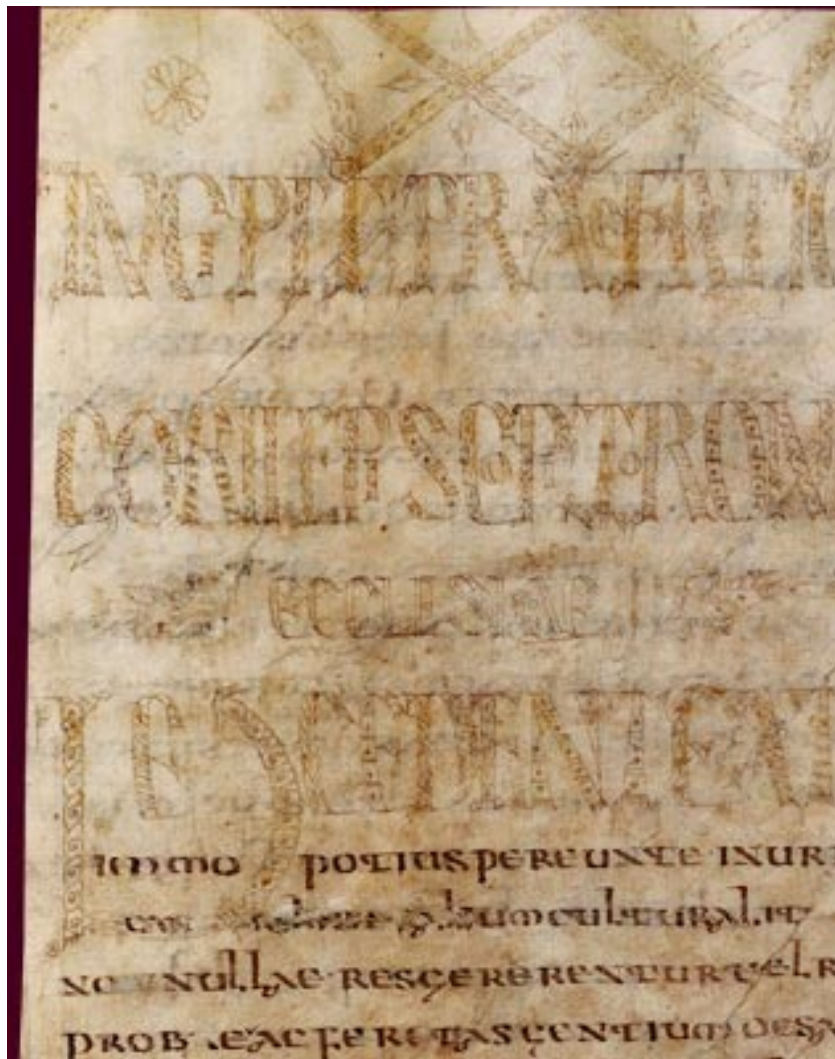
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*The partition of the Frankish kingdom among the four sons of Clovis with Clotilde presiding, as depicted in the 'Grandes Chroniques de Saint-Denis', Bibliothèque municipale de Toulouse*



*Saint Gregory and King Chilperic I, from the 'Grandes Chroniques de France de Charles V',  
fourteenth century illumination*



*The original frontispiece of 'Historia Francorum', seventh century manuscript*





*Early seventh century coin of Chlothar II, who is the principal character of the last four books of Gregory's history. Chlothar II (584-629), sometimes called 'the Young', was king of the Franks, ruling Neustria (584-629), Burgundy (613-629) and Austrasia (613-623).*

# BOOK I

HERE BEGINS THE PREFACE OF GREGORY, BISHOP OF THE CHURCH OF  
TOURS



IN THESE TIMES when the practice of letters declines, nay, rather perishes in the cities of Gaul, there has been found no scholar trained in the art of ordered composition to present in prose or verse a picture of the things that have befallen. Yet there have been done good things many, and evil many; the peoples savagely raged; the fury of kings grew sharp; churches were assailed by heretics and protected by catholics; the faith of Christ that glowed in many hearts was lukewarm in not a few; the faithful enriched the churches while the unbelievers stripped them bare. Wherefore the voice of lament was oftentimes raised, and men said: ‘Alas! for these our days! The study of letters is perished from us, nor is any found among our peoples able to set forth in a book the events of this present time.’

Now when I heard these and like complaints ever repeated, I was moved, with however rude an utterance, to hand down the memory of the past to future generations, in no wise leaving untold the conflicts of the wicked and those who lived in righteousness. I was the more encouraged because I often heard with surprise our people say that while the accomplished writer is understood by few, it is the man of plain speech who has the general ear.

Further, it seemed good to me for the better computation of the years, that in this first book, of which the chapters follow, I should begin from the foundation of the world.

# BOOK THE FIRST CONTENTS

IN THE NAME OF CHRIST HERE BEGINS THE FIRST BOOK OF THE  
CHURCH HISTORY OF GEORGIUS FLORENTIUS, OTHERWISE GREGORY,  
BISHOP OF TOURS



- I. Of Adam and Eve.
- II. Of Cain and Abel.
- III. Of Enoch the righteous.
- IV. Of the Flood.
- V. Of Chus, who first made a graven image.
- VI. Of Babylon.
- VII. Of Abraham and Ninus.
- VII. Of Isaac, Esau, Job, and Jacob.
- IX. Of Joseph in Egypt.
- X. Of the Crossing of the Red Sea.
- XI. Of the people in the desert, and of Joshua.
- XII. Of the Captivity of the Israelites, and their generations down to David.
- XIII. Of Solomon, and of the building of the Temple.
- XIV. Of the division of the Kingdom of Israel.
- XV. Of the captivity in Babylon.
- XVI. Of Christ's Nativity.
- XVII. Of divers kingdoms of the Gentiles.
- XVIII. When the city of Lyons was founded.
- XIX. Of the gifts of the Magi, and of the massacre of the Innocents.
- XX. Of the miracles and the Passion of Christ.
- XXI. Of Joseph who buried Him.
- XXII. Of James the Apostle.

- XXIII. Of the day of the Lord's Resurrection.
- XXIV. Of the Lord's Ascension, and of the death of Pilate and Herod.
- XXV. Of the Passion of the Apostles; and concerning Nero.
- XXVI. Of James, and of the Evangelists Mark and John.
- XXVII. Of the persecution under Trajan.
28. Of Hadrian and the inventions of the heretics; and of the Passion of the holy Polycarp and Justin.
29. Of the holy Photinus, Hirineus, and the other martyrs of Lyons.
- XXVIII. (30) Of the Seven sent to preach in Gaul.
31. Of the church at Bourges.
- XXIX. (32) Of Chroc and the shrine in Auvergne.
33. Of the martyrs of Auvergne.
34. Of the holy Privatus, martyr.
33. Of Quiriacus, bishop and martyr.
36. Of the birth of the holy Martin, and of the Invention of the Cross.
37. Of James of Nisibis, the bishop.
38. Of the passing of Anthony the monk.
- XXX. (39) Of the coming of the holy Martin.
- XXXI. (40) Of the matron Melania.
- XXXII. (41) Of the death of Valens the emperor.
- XXXIII. (42) Of the empire of Theodosius.
- XXXIV. (43) Of the death of the tyrant Maximin.
44. Of Urbicus, bishop of Clermont.
45. Of the holy Hillidius, the bishop.
46. Of the bishops Nepotianus and Arthemius.
47. Of the chastity of the lovers.
- XXXV. (48) Of the passing of Martin.

HERE END THE CHAPTERS OF BOOK I

[The period covered by this Book is from the Creation to A. D. 397.]

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