Any attention paid to the eighth book of the Palatine Anthology has traditionally been perfunctory if not outright disdainful. Now, however, a more sophisticated attitude has developed, whereby the book is evaluated as a whole, as a coherent collection of epigrams which focus on the theme of death and burial. The author’s marked tendency towards repeating the same motifs has undoubtedly hampered a positive perception of the collection. However, this propensity can be explained by the work’s didactic aim. Beyond any consideration of the contents and the valuable historical and social references they contain, not least the allusions to certain 4th century AD funerary practices, another clear reason for interest in these epigrams lies in their classical inspiration. As study of the author’s formal techniques and literary models intensifies, it has become increasingly clear in fact that Gregory is more classicizing in his epigrams than in the rest of his poetry. In the case of this epigram, as we shall see, it has not always been clear what kind of desecration was involved, if by Christians against pagan tombs or vice versa.

The history of the text’s creation is no less interesting than the issue of the tombs’ desecration, which Gregory discussed so vividly. In 1705, Mabillon published the text of the epigram in the updated second edition of the booklet *Eusebii Romani ad Theophilum Gallum epistula de cultu S.S. ignotorum*. However, in reality, Mabillon was just reproducing the text he had received from Jean Boivin, and he shared the latter’s doubts about the verses’ authorship. The reason for this digression lay in the early Christians’ habit of re-using pagan monuments and inscriptions, a practice that Mabillon himself had documented in his *Iter italicum*. The monk of St Maur was well aware that the pagans condemned this custom and he proves it by citing our epigram, which at that point was considered anonymous. The Greek title of the Boivin-Mabillon edition was also indicative of the more common interpretation of events: εἰς τοὺς ἀνορύττοντας τάφους προφάσει μαρτύρων. The Ambrosian scholiast, on the other hand, introduced the title κατὰ τυμβωρύχων.

Muratori reprinted Boivin’s text with a few textual notes and the same title and included a lengthy disquisition about tomb desecration (*de Christianorum sepulchris*). With regard to the epigram’s authorship, which Boivin did not attribute to Gregory of Nazianzus, even the italian philologist admitted the difficulty of recognizing in it Gregory’s usual formal elegance.

As to the history of the text, it is worth remarking that Mabillon instead of ἀθλοφόροις printed τοῖς ὁσίοις, which was Boivin’s reading. Unfortunately, it is not clear on what basis this conjecture, which is not supported by the manuscripts, was made (see Waltz).

Boivin also followed this reading, translating: “sepulchra Profanorum Sacerdotem Christianum in medio stantem habent”. It is hard to imagine that he was referring to a pagan priest, according to Eusebius’ use of θυηπόλος in *Vit. Cost.* 2.51. This was Boissonade’s interpretation, who rendered it with *flaminem*, and of some modern translators (cf. Paton, Pontani and Conca-Marzi), whereas Waltz prefers “un donneur d’encens”.

I accept Boivin’s emendation, as Muratori did, according to whom τρίς “sequentibus non bene respondet”. It is likely that in the midst of the trade in monuments and inscriptions that Gregory condemned, sometimes the same find might be sold more than once. The τρίς lesson of the codices probably arose by mistake, in order to try and match the meaning of the sentence to the epigram’s triadic scheme, but there is a clear risk of trivialization. Jacobs “probabiliter” and Waltz “fortasse recte” both support the amendment, while Paton, Beckby, Conca-Marzi, Pontani prefer the *lectio tradita*.

For another attestation of the verb ἱεροσυλέω (2x) in Gregory of Nazianzus with the meaning of ‘committing sacrilege against’ and which takes the accusative, cf. *epist.* 206.9. The meaning ‘plunder’ or ‘loot’ does not fit the context.

Thus, the sacrilege is clearly to the detriment of the martyrs’ tombs and in support of the pagans’ funerary monuments.

Gregory therefore is censuring the Christians who, in order to adorn the martyrs’ tombs, do so with precious objects stolen from pagan funerary monuments, and who, by doing so, even if motivated by good intentions, defile the graves of those martyrs they love.

*Conspectus siglorum*. *m*. = standard reading in all manuscripts; *codd*. = reading found in all codices except P; P = *Palatinus gr.* 23. Apart from this, the four most important manuscripts for reconstructing the text are the *Laurentianus* 7,10, the *Ambrosianus* gr. 433 (H 45 *Sup*.), the *Parisini* gr. 991 and 992. For further discussion of the manuscript tradition, see Waltz, *op. cit*., pp. 3-10 e 32-33.