Whereas any attention paid in the past to the eighth book of the *Palatine Anthology* was traditionally perfunctory if not outright disdainful, a more sophisticated attitude has developed recently, whereby the book is evaluated as a whole – a coherent collection of epigrams focusing on the themes of death and burial. Even the author’s marked tendency toward repetitif motifs, which has undoubtedly hampered a positive perception of the collection, is now explained by the work’s didactic aim.

Any attention paid to the eighth book of the Palatine Anthology has traditionally been perfunctory if not outright disdainful. Recently, however, a more sophisticated attitude has developed, whereby the book is evaluated as a whole – a coherent collection of epigrams focusing on the theme of death and burial. The author’s marked tendency toward repetitif 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 funerary practices of the 4th century AD, another clear reason for interest in these epigrams lies in their classical inspiration. With amplified attention paid to the author’s formal techniques and literary models, it has become increasingly clear 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, the kind of desecration involved, whether of pagan tombs by Christians or vice versa, has long been a matter of perplexity.

*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.

In terms of textual criticism, Mabillon published the epigram in 1705 in the updated second edition of the booklet *Eusebii Romani ad Theophilum Gallum epistula de cultu S.S. ignotorum*. ~~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~~*~~.~~ The French scholar was ,in fact, reproducing ~~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 proved 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 under the same title, with a few textual notes and 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 as *flaminem*, and that of some modern translators (cf. Paton, Pontani and Conca-Marzi), whereas Waltz prefers “un donneur d’encens”.

I accept Boivin’s emendation, as did Muratori, 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, the same find would sometimes be sold more than once. The τρίς lesson of the codices probably arose by mistake, in an attempt to match the meaning of the sentence to the epigram’s triadic scheme, but here we rund the risk of trivialization. Jacobs “probabiliter” and Waltz “fortasse recte” both support the amendment, while Paton, Beckby, Conca-Marzi, and Pontani prefer the *lectio tradita*.

For another instance of the verb ἱεροσυλέω (2x) in Gregory of Nazianzus with the meaning of “committing sacrilege against” in the accusative case, 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.