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Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle

and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam

Translated with an introduction and notes by
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCAG	Franz Cumont et al., *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum*
Chron 1234	*Chronicle of 1234*
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Peeters)
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
EI	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*
EIr	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*
GAS	Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*
GCAL	Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Msyr	Michael the Syrian
ODB	*Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*
Palmer, *WSC*	Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*
PLRE	*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*
PMBZ	*Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinische Zeit*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
TC	Theophilus' chronicle
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool University Press)

INTRODUCTION

to Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle: Its Historical and Literary Milieu, Dependants and Sources

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW[1]

The period from the end of the sixth century to the middle of the eighth century was one of quite dramatic events and major geopolitical changes in the Near East. It opened with the flight of the Persian emperor Khusrau II to the Byzantine emperor Maurice in Constantinople, seeking the latter's help against rival challengers at home. Maurice agreed to support Khusrau in his bid to recapture his throne, and the success of this move looked set to open a new era of peace and cooperation between these two superpowers. However, this expectation was dashed when Maurice was ousted in a coup by the general Phocas in 602. Khusrau, perhaps motivated in part by outrage on behalf of his erstwhile champion Maurice, but also substantially by opportunism, announced war and launched an all-out attack on the Byzantine empire. He was initially stunningly successful and by 626 all of Egypt and the Levant were in his hands and his armies were baying at the walls of Constantinople itself. However, Phocas had been overthrown in 610 by the energetic Heraclius, who struck back, not by countering all the different Persian contingents in the various provinces, but by marching eastwards into Armenia and then heading southwards to attack the Iraqi heartlands of the Persian realm. At Nineveh in 627 he won a resounding victory against one of Khusrau's top generals and the way was then open to him to march on the Persian capital directly, sacking royal residences as he went and putting the defeated and disgraced emperor Khusrau to flight.

Shiroi, Khusrau's son, made peace with Heraclius in 628 and agreed to restore to the Byzantines all of the lands seized by the Persian troops. Again, all looked set for an irenic future. In 630 Heraclius celebrated the triumph of the Christian world by restoring the relics of the cross of Jesus to Jerusalem,

1 This overview is only meant as a brief introduction for the newcomer to this period and region, and so I do not give any references. For more information and suggested reading see the works cited in the relevant section of the translation below.

entering it in great pomp and ceremony only sixteen years after the city's sack at the hands of the Persians. But yet again these hopes were shattered. The Persian Empire descended into civil war, rival factions putting up their own candidates for the imperial office. Arab tribes took advantage of the chaos in the Persian sphere and the weakness in the Byzantine lands to launch major raids right across the Middle East. After a series of lightning campaigns lasting but a decade (633–42), they established a hold over the Byzantine provinces of Egypt and the Levant and the whole empire of Persia which they were never to relinquish. Possessing their own culture and faith, they felt no pressure to become assimilated after the fashion of the sackers of Rome, and their successes only made it clearer to them that they were on the right path: 'It is a sign of God's love for us and pleasure with our faith that he has given us dominion over all religions and all peoples.'[2] The Umayyads, the first Muslim dynasty (660–750), set about laying the foundations of a new empire from their capital at Damascus. They built new cities to house their troops, palaces for the elite, mosques for the faithful, and they renewed markets and undertook irrigation projects to stimulate the economy, all the while sending out armies to extend their dominion into Africa, Asia Minor and Central Asia. For the administration of their vast territories, competent managers were required and, since the Muslim rulers paid no heed to the birth or creed or rank of non-Arabs, there were great opportunities for advancement open to the able. Conversion was not essential – thus Athanasius bar Gumaye made his fortune as right-hand man to 'Abd al-'Aziz, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik's brother and governor of Egypt, while remaining a devout Christian – but it was nevertheless very common, especially among prisoners-of-war or émigrés to Muslim cities, who would have spent all their time among Muslims. Their entry into the Islamic fold, though a grief to their former co-religionaries, lent a tremendous variety and vitality to the nascent Muslim world since they came from all creeds and walks of life, and it meant that Byzantium came face to face with a new and vibrant civilisation taking shape within its own former provinces.

The confrontation of these two powers dominated Near Eastern politics for centuries. Initially each strove to vanquish the other totally. However, 'Abd al-Malik's construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, his minting of aniconic coins bearing the Muslim profession of faith and his moves to institute Arabic as the official language of the

2 *Dispute between an Arab and a monk of the convent of Bet Hale*, Codex Diyarbekir 95, fol. 2a, cited in my *Seeing Islam*, 467.

new empire made it clear to all that the Muslim realm was to be no mere temporary phenomenon. Equally, the disastrous failure of the Muslims' great thrust to take Constantinople in the early eighth century demonstrated to them that the Byzantines were not so easily to be ousted. Subsequently, war in the field was often no more than a ritual display, and the battle became rather one of words.

At times it looked as though the Arabs' dominion in the Middle East might not endure, for they fought a number of civil wars among themselves during this period: in 656–61, 683–92 and 744–50. The first was sparked off by the murder of the third caliph 'Uthman by veteran warriors angry at being shortchanged in favour of newcomers and at his nepotistic style of rule, and then continued as a contest over who would be the fourth caliph: Mu'awiya, a kinsman of 'Uthman, or 'Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. The second and third civil wars were in part a fight for the caliphate between rival families of the tribe of Quraysh and in part a dispute over the nature of Islam and its role in public life. In the course of the third civil war one particular family of Quraysh, the Abbasids, took advantage of the infighting among the Umayyad family to seize control, with the aid of troops from eastern Iran. This change of dynasty was momentous, for it led to the transfer of the capital of the Muslim Arab Empire from Syria to Iraq. Whereas the Umayyad realm, based in Damascus, was strongly influenced by Byzantine provincial economic and cultural models, the new regime looked eastwards, finding its inspiration in Iran and Central Asia. It was in a sense the Persian Empire reborn as a monotheist power; its new capital, Baghdad, was even located no more than a stone's throw from the old Persian seat of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Once it had been the Byzantine and Persian empires that were described as the 'twin eyes' of the east; now it was the Byzantine and Islamic empires, as was noted by the Byzantine patriarch Nicholas to the caliph Muqtadir (908–32): 'The two powers of the whole universe, the power of the Arabs and that of the Romans, stand out and radiate as the two great luminaries in the firmament; for this reason alone we must live in common as brothers although we differ in customs, manners and religion.'[3] Yet the Arabs, at least up to the time covered by this book (*ca.* 750s), maintained fairly unitary control over an area far greater than the Persian Empire had ever held, in modern terms from Morocco to Afghanistan. And the Byzantine Empire hardly deserved that name, retaining sover-

3 Cited by P. Charanis in his review of Vasiliev's *Byzance et les Arabes*, *Speculum* 45 (1970), 501.

eignty over little more than Asia Minor and the Balkans. Whereas the Arabs had to wrestle with the problem of how to govern such a vast kingdom effectively, the Byzantines had to struggle with the question of how to make do with such curtailed territories.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Byzantinists tend to view the period from 630 to the 750s as a historiographical desert and speak of it as a 'long silence' or 'long gap'.[4] This is in part because history-writing in the sixth century had enjoyed a considerable measure of vitality. All the three main genres were well represented: secular classicising history (Procopius, Agathias, Menander, John of Epiphaneia and Theophylact Simocatta), church history (Zosimus, John of Ephesus and Evagrius) and the world chronicle (John Malalas and John of Antioch).[5] And it is also in part because there are almost no extant historical texts for this period; its events are of course charted by later historians, but the works they depend on do not in general survive.

Because of this historiographical dearth, it seems worthwhile to try and recover one text that was definitely composed at this time, the chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa, an astrologer in the Abbasid court in Iraq in the second half of the eighth century. It has become accepted of late to identify Theophilus' chronicle with the so-called 'eastern source', the existence of which had been postulated from the eighteenth century.[6] This conclusion had been arrived at from careful comparison of three later Christian chroniclers: the Byzantine monk Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818), the

4 Treadgold, *Early Byzantine Historians*, 340, 348. For a survey of what history was being written in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and a consideration of why it was curtailed, see Whitby, 'Greek Historical Writing after Procopius'. See also my *Seeing Islam*, ch. 10, which I draw upon here.

5 For the historiography of this period see Croke and Emmett, *History and Historians in Late Antiquity*, ch. 1; Croke, 'Byzantine Chronicle Writing'; Treadgold, *Early Byzantine Historians*, chs. 6–9; Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque*.

6 See especially Conrad, 'The Conquest of Arwad' (Conrad, 'Theophanes', 5–6, refers to earlier literature), and Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir*, 143 n. 52. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 192–236, assesses the worth of Theophilus, but without discussing its composition/transmission. Shortly before I was due to submit this book, I was put in contact by Glen Bowersock with a student of his, Maria Conterno, who was about to submit a PhD thesis on the 'eastern source', but we decided, since we were both at a very advanced stage in our respective projects, that it would be better to complete them independently. Maria's work will undoubtedly be an important re-evaluation of the 'eastern source'.

West Syrian patriarch Dionysius of Telmahre (d. 845),[7] and Agapius, bishop of the north Syrian city of Manbij (wr. 940s).[8] The latter, who relies very heavily upon the 'eastern source' for the period 630–750s, states explicitly that he has drawn upon the 'books'[9] of Theophilus of Edessa:

> Theophilus the Astrologer, from whom we took these accounts, said: 'I was myself a constant witness of these wars and I would write things down so that nothing of them escaped me.' He has many books about that and we have abbreviated from them this book. We added to it what we perceived to be indispensable, but we avoided prolixity.[10]

Dionysius of Telmahre also names Theophilus as one of his informants:

> One of these writers (who wrote 'narratives resembling ecclesiastical history') was Theophilus of Edessa, a Chalcedonian who regarded it as his birthright to loathe the Orthodox (...)[11] We shall take from the writings of this man some details here and there from those parts which are reliable and do not deviate from the truth.[12]

7 Though not extant, Dionysius' work is heavily drawn upon by Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and the anonymous chronicler of AD 1234 (see the sections dealing with these two authors below).

8 Brooks, 'Theophanes and the Syriac Chroniclers'; Becker, 'Eine neue christliche Quelle'; Conrad, 'Theophanes', 43. Manbij is the Arabic name of the city; the Syriac name is Mabbug and it was known to Greek-speakers as Hierapolis.

9 Arabic *kutub*, a quite general term that one could also simply translate as 'writings'.

10 Agapius, 525. The wars in question are those between the Arab dynasties of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and Agapius wants to add weight to his narrative by noting that it derives from an eyewitness. However, that Theophilus' 'many books' dealt with Christian as well as Muslim history may be inferred from Dionysius' remark that Theophilus' writings sometimes misrepresented the Miaphysites.

11 For Eastern Christians the question of orthodoxy/heresy mostly turned on the problem of Christ's nature. The Miaphysites (or Monophysites; Copts in Egypt, Jacobites in Syria) wished not to dilute the divinity of Christ and so insisted on one divine nature, the human and divine elements having fused at the incarnation. The Nestorians (or East Syrian Christians), found chiefly in Iraq and Persia, wanted to hold on to the very comforting fact that Christ had become a human being like us and to avoid saying that God had suffered and died, and so stressed two distinct natures, a human and a divine. Trying desperately to eschew the two extremes of denial of Christ's humanity and dualism, the Chalcedonians (or Melkites), who represented the imperial position, postulated two natures, united but distinct. Each group would tend to refer to themselves as the Orthodox. Though important in their own right, these confessional divisions were also bound up with regional, ethnic and linguistic affiliations. See further Atiya, *Eastern Christianity*, and Meyendorff, *Eastern Christian Thought*.

12 Michael the Syrian (henceforth Msyr) 10.XX, 378/358; see below for further discussion of this passage.

The fact that Theophilus of Edessa is indeed known to have penned 'a fine work of history'[13] has been regarded as proof positive that Theophilus is the author of the 'eastern source'. The situation is a little more complex than this, as will be shown later on in this introduction, but I will first give the reader some insight into the life of this important character and present the writers who used his chronicle and those whom Theophilus himself might have relied upon to compile it.

THEOPHILUS' LIFE AND WORKS

If we can believe an anecdote that relates how he died within a few days of the caliph Mahdi (775–85), at the age of ninety, then Theophilus was born in 695 in, as his name suggests, the city of Edessa in northern Syria.[14] In a letter to his son, who bore the very classical name of Deukalion, he implies that he is accompanying the future caliph Mahdi on a campaign in the east, presumably acting as his astrological adviser:

> I was urged, as you know, by those holding power to undertake these things (i.e. write a treatise on military forecasts) at the time when we made the expedition with them to the east in the province of *Margianēs* (i.e. Margiana, the Merw oasis).[15]

Thereafter he remained in the service of Mahdi, becoming chief astrologer during his reign and taking up residence in Baghdad.[16] His scientific writings have been fragmentarily preserved and very little studied, so we cannot yet be certain of what he wrote.[17] Very popular was his *Peri katarchōn*

13 Bar Hebraeus, *CS*, 127; *MD*, 220.

14 Bar Hebraeus, *CS*, 126–27; *MD*, 219–20.

15 Cumont, *CCAG* 5.1, 234. A second edition of this work contains a chapter *De stellis fixis* which gives a planetary conjunction correct for 768 (Cumont, *CCAG* 5.1, 212). The campaign must, therefore, be before 768 and very likely refers to Mahdi's activities in AH 141/758–59 in Khurasan, quelling the revolt of its governor 'Abd al-Jabbar with the help of Khazim ibn Khuzayma, and in Tabaristan (Tabari, 3.134–37).

16 Ibn al-Qifti, 109; Cumont, *CCAG*, 1.130 (an astronomical calculation made by Theophilus at Baghdad).

17 Cumont, *CCAG* 5.1, 229 n. 32; Breydy, 'Das Chronikon des Maroniten Theophilos ibn Tuma', though note that he incorrectly identifies Theophilus with the author of a Maronite chronicle; the labelling of Theophilus as Maronite begins only with Bar Hebraeus (but is accepted by most modern scholars – e.g. Conrad, 'Theophanes, 43; 'The Conquest of Arwad', 331; 'The *Mawālī*', 388), whereas earlier writers, such as Dionysius of Telmahre, just call him Chalcedonian. See also *PMBZ*, 'Theophilos' 8183.

polemikōn ('On Military Forecasts'), which was cited by later Muslim astrologers and chapters of which made their way to Byzantium to become incorporated in a mid-ninth century collection of astrological writings.[18] Astrology was evidently his passion, for in the preface to the second edition of the aforementioned work, addressed to his son Deukalion, he defends it vociferously against those who would slander its name, among whom 'church leaders' were the most conspicuous.[19] However, he also found time for other learned pursuits, and is said to have translated into Syriac Galen's *On the Method of Maintaining Good Health*,[20] Homer's *Iliad* and possibly Aristotle's *Sophistici*.[21]

Theophilus' Dependants

I should emphasise at the outset that by using the term 'dependants' I do not mean that the authors below used Theophilus' chronicle in a slavish manner. Indeed, one of the key conclusions to be drawn from the translation below is that while it is clear that Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius relied substantially on a single common source, they nevertheless felt free to creatively revise and reshape it, to abbreviate and reword it, and to supplement it with material from other sources.

1. Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818; writing in Greek)

Theophanes was born in 760 to noble and rich parents. His father, governor of the region by the Aegean Sea, died while his son was still young. As heir to extensive estates in Bithynia and a considerable fortune, Theophanes spent his youth in 'hunting and riding' and married a woman of comparable wealth. He entered imperial service with the rank of groom and was assigned the task of superintending the rebuilding of the fortifications at Cyzicus on the southern side of the Sea of Marmara. He would undoubtedly

18 This is the so-called *Synatagma Laurentianum*, on which see Boll, 'Überlieferungsgeschichte', 88–110. For Muslim references to Theophilus see Sezgin, *GAS*, 7.49–50; Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimniswissenschaften*, 302; Rosenthal, 'From Arabic Books', 454–55 (cf. Cumont, *CCAG*, 1.83).

19 Cumont, *CCAG*, 5.1, 234–38; discussed in Beck, *Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung*, 70.

20 Bergstrasser, *Hunain ibn Ishaq*, §84, though this could possibly be a different Theophilus of Edessa.

21 Homer: Bar Hebraeus, *CS*, 127; *MD*, 220; and see Conrad, 'The *Mawālī*', 388–89. Aristotle: both Ibn al-Nadim and 'Isa ibn Zur'a refer to a translation of Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* by a certain Theophilus (*Thāwufīlā*), taken to be Theophilus of Edessa by Peters, *Aristoteles arabus*, 25.

have risen to high office, but decided to renounce his property and become a monk. He established his wife at a convent, while he founded a monastery on the island of Kalonymos, in the Sea of Marmara, and spent six years there practising calligraphy. He later oversaw the construction of another monastery at Agros in Bithynia, where he remained for much of his life. When he refused to approve the iconoclastic policies of Leo V (813–20), he was placed under guard and then exiled, but died 23 days later on 12 March 818.[22]

In his fiftieth year (*ca.* 810) Theophanes fell ill with a disease of the kidney and was confined to his bed, where he remained for the rest of his life. Shortly thereafter he was entrusted by his friend George Syncellus (d. *ca.* 813) with the materials (*aphormai*) necessary to continue the *Chronographia* that George had begun[23] but was unable to finish due to ill health:

> He (George) begged me very much not to shrink from it and leave the work unfinished, and so forced me to take it in hand. Being thus constrained by my obedience to him to undertake a task above my powers, I expended an uncommon amount of labour. For I, too, after seeking out to the best of my ability and examining many books, have written down accurately – as best I could – this chronicle from Diocletian down to the reign of Michael (811–13) and his son Theophylact, namely the reigns of the emperors and the patriarchs and their deeds, together with their dates. I did not set down anything of my own composition, but have made a selection from the ancient historians and prose-writers and have consigned to their proper places the events of every year, arranged without confusion. In this manner the readers may be able to know in which year of each emperor what event took place, be it military or ecclesiastical or civic or popular or of any other kind; for I believe that one who reads the actions of the ancients derives no small benefit from so doing. (Theophanes, 3–4; trans. Mango, 'preface')

The nature of the 'materials' that George had pressed upon Theophanes is not made clear, but it has been argued by Mango that they constituted almost

22 This paragraph is drawn from the two main sources for Theophanes' life: a panegyric by St Theodore the Studite, probably delivered in 821 upon the deposition of Theophanes' body in his monastery, and a biography by Methodius, future patriarch of Constantinople (843–47), written before 832 (see Efthymiadis, 'Le panégyrique de S. Théophane', 259–60). Neither source mentions that Theophanes wrote a chronicle, but the link between the man and the work has become accepted, though niggling doubts remain (see the bibliography given in n. 24 below).

23 He got as far as the reign of Diocletian (285–305) before becoming ill. For the nature and scope of his *Chronographia* see the very useful introduction to the translation of this text by Adler and Tuffin, which also surveys modern scholarship on George Syncellus.

the whole of what goes under the name of Theophanes' *Chronographia*, and that Theophanes himself did little beyond a certain amount of redaction and the verification of some facts and calculations.[24] The most cogent arguments for this are that Theophanes is presented in his biography as 'lacking a formal education' and, for the period of the *Chronographia*'s composition (810–14), as 'bed-ridden and motionless', and so incapable on both counts of undertaking the extensive research necessary for such a major project. Moreover, George, who had spent much time in Palestine, was better placed to gather information on eastern affairs, the prominence of which are so much a feature of the *Chronographia*; that George intended to write on this is stated in the preface to his own work:

> From them ('divinely inspired scriptures and the more illustrious historians'), I have extracted the greater part of this work, with the exception of a few things that have taken place in our own times. And I shall endeavour to make a kind of synopsis, always alert to combining continuity with accuracy, and maintaining correspondence in the sequence of events: I mean about the various kings and the numbering of priests, as well as prophets and apostles, martyrs and teachers..., culling everything from the aforementioned historians, to the extent that I am able. And finally, I shall treat the covenant, abominable to God, that has been made against Christ and our nation both by 'the tents of the Idumaeans and by the Ishamaelites' (Psalms 82.6), who hound the people of the Spirit and by the judgement of God also practise the apostasy that was prophesied by the blessed Paul for the end of days (2 Thess. 2.3). These things I shall describe to the best of my ability up to the current year, the 6300th from the creation of the universe, the first year of the indiction (808).[25]

Certainly Mango's theory would explain two rather odd facts about Theophanes' *Chronographia*: its annalistic format, which could then be seen as a borrowing from the Syriac tradition adopted by George while in Palestine, and the rather poorly edited condition of the text, in which differences in style and the spelling of names from one page to the next are allowed to stand.[26]

Since he is attempting to write a universal chronicle, Theophanes gives

24 Mango, 'Who Wrote the Chronicle of Theophanes?'; Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 'intro.' (II. The Chronicle and Its Authorship). For Theophanes' sources see Pigulevskaja, 'Theophanes' *Chronographia*'; Proudfoot, 'The Sources of Theophanes'; Brandes, 'Frühe Islam'. Scott, 'Writing the Reign of Justinian', qualifies Mango's argument somewhat, allowing for a little more interventionist editing by Theophanes.

25 George Syncellus, *Chronographia*, 5–6 (trans. Adler and Tuffin, 8).

26 Examples are given by Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 'intro.' (II), which consist of disagreement between text and rubric, repetitions of the same events, the appearance of same persons and places under variant names, sundry confusions and inconsistencies.

information on both Byzantine and Arab affairs. For the latter he is heavily dependent upon the 'eastern source' for the period 630–740s. Even after this date, however, Theophanes continues to narrate events occurring in Muslim-ruled lands, until *ca.* 780. Either he made use of another chronicle for these three decades or, more likely, he had at his disposal a continuation of the 'eastern source'.[27] The preponderance of material concerning Syria and Palestine suggests that the continuator was from that region.[28] Most of the very few entries in Theophanes for the period 630–740s that are not from the 'eastern source' are also concerned with Syria and Palestine, so it is likely that this continuator was a redactor as well, inserting the occasional entry within the text of the 'eastern source'.[29] The addition of notices on the succession of the Melkite patriarchs of Antioch in the years 742–56 implies that this continuator/redactor was a Melkite clergyman. It is quite possible that it was George Syncellus himself who did this work. We know he was based in Palestine for a time, at one of the monasteries in the Judaean desert,[30] and he specifically states that, in addition to the material of earlier historians, he added 'a few events which happened in our own times' (quoted in full above). This suggestion is not in the end provable, but it is plausible and is a very neat and economical solution.

When compared to Agapius and Dionysius, it becomes immediately apparent that the 'eastern source', as he appears in Theophanes, has been substantially abbreviated and his notices have sometimes been amalgamated, thus creating a causal link between events that seem originally to have been unconnected.[31] This compression is probably a consequence of Theophanes' bias for Byzantine affairs and should not be attributed to the continuator.[32]

27 It does not seem likely that the 'eastern source' itself continued until 780, for the chronicles of Agapius and Dionysius no longer share any notices with Theophanes after the 740s.

28 See Appendix 1 below; Brooks, 'Theophanes and the Syriac Chroniclers', 587; Conrad, 'The Conquest of Arwad', 336–38.

29 E.g. Theophanes, 328 (Heraclius visits Tiberias), 335–36 (battle of Mu'ta), 348 (death of Thomas, bishop of Apamea, and the burning of the bishop of Hims), 412 (Iraqis burn the markets of Damascus).

30 Thus regarding Rachel's tomb situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem he says (*Chronographia*, 122 [trans. Adler and Tuffin, 153]): 'In my journeys to Bethlehem and what is known as the Old Laura of blessed Chariton I personally have passed by there frequently and seen her coffin lying there on the ground'. See also Mango, 'Who Wrote the Chronicle of Theophanes?', 13 n. 16; Huxley, 'Erudition', 215–16.

31 E.g. Theophanes, 365 ('Abd al-Malik's minting of coins and Justinian's breaking of the peace), 399 (earthquake in Syria and 'Umar II's banning of wine).

32 It was probably Theophanes too who chose to compress the account of the Arab-Persian confrontation into one short notice.

2. Dionysius of Telmahre (d. 845; writing in Syriac)

Dionysius came from a wealthy and well-established Edessan family. He studied at the monasteries of Qenneshre and of Mar Jacob at Kayshum before being elevated to the position of patriarch of the West Syrian church in 818, which position he held until his death in 845.[33] At the request of John, metropolitan of Dara, he consented to undertake what others, despite his exhortations, had declined to do, namely 'to set down in writing for the generations which are to come the events which have occurred (in the past) and which are occurring in our own time'.[34] The finished product was described by a later chronicler as follows:

> He composed it in two parts and in sixteen books, each part containing eight books divided into chapters. He wrote it at the request of John, metropolitan of Dara. In this chronicle are included the times, a period of 260 years, from the beginning of the reign of Maurice – that is, from the year 894 of the Greeks (582) – until the year 1154 (842) in which there died Theophilus, emperor of the Romans, and Abu Ishaq (Mu'tasim), king of the Arabs.[35]

This division into parts – one devoted to church history, the other to secular history – and books and chapters indicates a sophisticated approach that differs from that found in earlier Syriac historiography. In his preface Dionysius characterises his work as a *pragmateia*, a term used by classical writers to mean a treatise strictly and systematically formulated, and he distances himself from those who 'composed their narratives in a summary and fragmented fashion without preserving either chronological accuracy or the order of succession of events'. In contrast to such writings, he says, 'Our aim is to bring together in this book everything which our feeble self is able, with God's assistance, to collect, and to ascertain the accuracy (of each report) as attested by many persons worthy of credence, to select (the best version) and then to write it down in (correct) order'.[36]

Bar a few fragments, Dionysius' achievement unfortunately does not

33 Abramowski, *Dionysius von Telmahre*, discusses the Church and its relationship with the state in Dionysius' time and also Dionysius' own contribution as patriarch.

34 Msyr 10.XX, 378/358 (Dionysius' preface).

35 Msyr 12.XXI, 544/111.

36 Msyr 11.XVIII, 454/487–88. This is a literal rendering; the translation of Palmer, *WSC*, 94–95, makes it clearer: 'Weak as I am, my aim is as follows: To collect with the help of God whatever information I can find and to put it all in this book in good order, selecting the most reliable version of events attested by the majority of trustworthy witnesses and writing them down here in the correct sequence.' For more detailed discussion of the format of Dionysius' chronicle see Conrad, 'Syriac Perspectives', 28–39; Palmer, *WSC*, 85–104.

survive.[37] Much can, however, be recovered by comparing the writings of those who later drew upon it, notably the West Syrian patriarch Michael the Syrian (1166–99) and an anonymous Edessan chronicler of the early thirteenth century whose work is referred to simply as the *Chronicle of 1234*, since that is the year in which it stops.[38] These two authors were compiling their chronicles within a decade of one another and yet would seem to have been working independently. Both explicitly cite Dionysius a number of times,[39] and Michael implies that Dionysius was his only substantial source for the period 582–842. We can, therefore, be reasonably sure that every notice common to both writers in this period derives from Dionysius. However, neither of these two passes his *oeuvre* on to us intact; rather, they both add, omit, abbreviate, rephrase and reshape.[40] Michael breaks up the text of Dionysius and distributes the material over three columns devoted to ecclesiastical affairs, natural phenomena and civil history. The *Chronicle of 1234* has one continuous narrative until the time of Constantine and then divides its notices into secular and church history, relegating the latter to the end. Michael's ecclesiastical column is extensive, but much of this is treated as civil history by the chronicler of 1234, whose church history is relatively small.[41] It seems likely that Dionysius, given his position as patriarch, would have deemed his ecclesiastical history the more important and so given it greater space, but it is difficult to say for sure.

In the preface to his work Dionysius states that he would take from Theophilus of Edessa 'only those parts which are reliable and do not deviate

37 These fragments are edited and translated by Abramowski, *Dionysius von Telmahre*, 130–44. A few brief citations from Dionysius are also given by Elias of Nisibis, 1.174–80 (AH 138, 140, 142, 146, 152–53)

38 For these two authors and their chronicles see Chabot's and Fiey's introduction to their translations of Michael and the *Chronicle of 1234* respectively, and most recently Weltecke, 'Les trois grandes chroniques syro-orthodoxes'.

39 *Chron 1234*, 2.17–20, 257, 267; for the numerous references of Michael to Dionysius see Conrad, 'Syriac Perspectives', 30 and n. 87 thereto.

40 At different times each will have a longer account than the other; since historical information about the seventh and eighth centuries was scarce, it is unlikely that either was able to add new details, so they must both at times be abbreviating. An example of how they both rework Dionysius is given by Brock, 'Syriac Life of Maximus', 337–40, and it is made very clear in my translation below.

41 E.g. Cyrus' part in the conquest of Egypt, the Jews' removal of crosses from the Mount of Olives and the appearance of a false Tiberius (see translation below). Though there are occasions when the reverse is true; e.g. the notice on the Arab attack on the convent of Simeon the Stylite is in the ecclesiastical part of *Chron 1234*, 2.260, but in the civil section of Msyr 11.VI, 417/422.

from the truth'. The reason for this proviso is the rivalry in their faith, Dionysius being a Miaphysite and Theophilus a Chalcedonian. In reality, however, Dionysius conveys to us more of Theophilus than either Theophanes or Agapius, albeit only through the filters of Michael and the *Chronicle of 1234*. Most of the notices in Michael's civil history column for the period 630–750 have a counterpart in Theophanes and Agapius, and so most clearly represent Theophilus; but many of Michael's notices on natural phenomena and almost all of the ecclesiastical reports derive from elsewhere.[42] The *Chronicle of 1234* has often been thought to best preserve Dionysius, and so Theophilus. This is true to the extent that it often quotes Dionysius in full and does not break up the narrative structure into subject categories as Michael does. Yet on closer study it proves to be quite an eclectic work. For example, it dislikes short notices, preferring to have a paragraph's worth before accepting a report. And for the Arab conquests and the first Arab civil war it turns to Muslim sources, not merely supplementing, but borrowing wholesale.[43] Except for these two occasions, however, almost of all of its notices on civil affairs would seem to derive from Theophilus.

It is evident that Dionysius produced a comprehensive and carefully structured work. The church history takes centre stage, coming first and comprising a formidable array of documents; the secular history follows, smaller in size, but great efforts were made to assemble as much material as possible. The two parts, assigned eight books each, were then cross-referenced and otherwise linked by glimpses forward and flashbacks, and the whole was set forth in a fluid and florid Syriac diction.[44] For Islamicists it is valuable as the best witness to Theophilus of Edessa's chronicle and for revealing to us something of the life and conditions of the Christians, who still constituted a majority of the population of the Near East in Dionysius' day.

42 Michael also reports a number of censuses, seemingly not drawn from Theophilus; e.g. *ca.* 668 Abu l-A'war made a census of Christian labourers/soldiers for the first time (Msyr 11.XII, 435/450); in AG 1009/698 'Atiyya made a census of foreigners (Msyr 11.XVI, 447/473; *Chron 819*, 13).

43 This is important to note; I had myself, taking over received wisdom that the *Chronicle of 1234* accurately represented Dionysius (e.g. Palmer, *WSC*, 102: 'I assume that the Chronicle of 1234 preserves Dionysius faithfully'), accepted that the Arabic material was inserted by Dionysius (see Hoyland, 'Arabic, Syriac and Greek Historiography'). However, since not a single item of it is found in Michael, this cannot be so and must have become included in the *Chronicle of 1234* at a later date.

44 See Palmer, *WSC*, 85–89, for references and further discussion.

3. Agapius, bishop of Manbij (wr. 940s; writing in Arabic)

The earliest manuscript of this author's chronicle, Sinai Arab 580 of the late tenth century,[45] assigns it the following title: 'The book of history, the composition of Mahbub son of Constantine the Byzantine of Manbij, the title of which is (dedicated) to the man crowned with the virtues of wisdom, versed in the ways of philosophy, commended by the truths of knowledge, righteous and benevolent, Abu Musa 'Isa son of Husayn.'[46] Unfortunately we know nothing about the latter character and very little about Agapius (the Greek equivalent of Mahbub) himself beyond what is in the heading.[47] His work begins with Creation and halts abruptly at the end of the reign of Leo IV (775–80), but he would seem to have continued until *ca.* 942, since at one point he states that 'the kingdom of the Arabs' has endured for 330 years.[48] The work was known to the Muslim polymath Mas'udi (d. 956), who deemed it one of the best books he had seen by the Melkites on history.[49]

Agapius has very little information for the years 630–750s that is not drawn from Theophilus of Edessa. The only other source that we can detect is a Muslim history, which is revealed from the occasional provision of a Hijri date or the full name of a Muslim authority, and also from notices such as who led the pilgrimage in certain years and who the governors were for a particular caliph.[50] He would also seem to be dipping into it for certain events of key importance to the political life of the Muslims, especially their

45 See Gibson, 'Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts', 123–24; Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai*, 23.

46 The Bodleian manuscript (Hunt 478 dated 1320) misses out a few words of the title, giving simply: 'The book of the title crowned…' (*Kitāb al-'unwān al-mukallal…*) and this is how the work has come to be known (i.e. as the 'Book of the Title'/*Kitāb al-'Unwān*).

47 Such information as we do have about him is collected by Vasiliev, 'Agapij Manbidjskij'; see also Graf, *GCAL*, 2.39–41, and Nasrallah, *Mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite* 2.2, 50–52.

48 Agapius, 456. The year AH 330 corresponds to 941–42; this is equated by Agapius to AG 1273, but a marginal note says 'it is wrong', and indeed it should read AG 1253.

49 Mas'udi, 154.

50 E.g. Agapius, 474 ('Umar replaced Khalid with Abu 'Ubayda as commander of Syria), 476 ('Umar appointed Abu 'Ubayda over Egypt in addition to Syria), 477 ('Umar named Mu'awiya governor of Syria in place of Abu 'Ubayda), 483 ('Uthman led the pilgrimage in the eighth year of his reign), 485 ('Abdallah ibn 'Abbas led the pilgrimage in the year of 'Uthman's murder), 487 (Mu'awiya's governors), 488 (Marwan ibn al-Hakam led the pilgrimage, 'Amr ibn al-'As died). Also the notice on Mu'awiya's capture of Rhodes, which adds details to Theophilus' account, may derive from this Muslim chronology (see Conrad, 'Arabs and the Colossus', 173).

various civil wars.[51] In addition, it may underlie his chronology, for most of his notices are dated according to the years of the reigning caliph. As regards his use of Theophilus, Agapius is rather erratic, sometimes quoting him at length, at other times abbreviating him considerably.

4. The Chronicle of Siirt (written in Arabic)

This text, so called because the manuscript was discovered in the town of southern Turkey bearing that name, narrates the history of the saints and patriarchs of the Nestorian church, and the principal events of the Roman, Persian and Arab empires that impinged upon it. Its interest for us is somewhat limited since the two volumes that contain the work are both defective at the beginning and end: it starts abruptly in 251, has a lacuna in the middle corresponding to the years 423–83, and halts mid-sentence in 650.[52] It presumably began with Jesus, demonstrating the continuity of the Eastern Church with Christianity's fount. How far it extended is less easy to say. The mention of place names such as Baghdad (founded in 762), Samarra (830s) and Jazirat ibn 'Umar (founded by and named after Hasan ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab al-Taghlibi, d. *ca.* 865), and the reference to Mosul as the seat of a metropolitan (from 820s) take us to the late ninth century.[53]

Further indications can be gleaned from the sources that the chronicler names at intervals. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Daniel bar Maryam, a contemporary of the patriarch Isho'yahb III (d. 658), is cited five times, and that of two other approximate contemporaries, Elias of Merw and Bar Sahde, are cited two and three times respectively. The works of the eighth-century theologian Shahdust, bishop of Tirhan, and the biographies compiled by the patriarch Isho' bar Nun (824–28) are each excerpted twice. And the Chalcedonian philosopher and physician Qusta ibn Luqa, who died some time in the reign of the caliph Muqtadir (907–32), is cited four times, bringing us into the tenth century.[54] A *terminus ante quem* is given by the observation

51 It is, however, very difficult to determine the content of Theophilus' account of the first civil war, since his dependants each have very different accounts (see the entry thereon in the translation below).

52 On the manuscripts of this work see Degen, 'Zwei Miszellen zur Chronik von Se'ert', 84–91.

53 Fiey, 'Isho'denah et la Chronique de Séert', 455; note that the text of Muhammad's pact with the Christians of Najran was said to have been discovered in AH 265/879 (*Chron Siirt* CII, *PO* 13, 601).

54 References and further literature on each are given by Sako, 'Les sources de la Chronique de Séert', where other minor sources are noted, though not Theophilus of Edessa.

that Isho'yahb III was the last head of the church to bear this name,[55] which means that the work antedates the appointment of Isho'yahb IV in 1020. The *Chronicle of Siirt* was, therefore, composed between 907 and 1020.

A source not cited by the chronicler is the work of Theophilus of Edessa. Unfortunately, since the *Chronicle of Siirt* breaks off in 650, we do not have much material for comparison with Theophilus, but there are a few notices that reveal close correspondence: the pact between Heraclius and Nicetas to depose Phocas (AD 610), the rift between Khusrau and Shahrbaraz (*ca.* 626), Khusrau's dispatch of Rozbihan against Heraclius (627), a sign in the sky *ca.* 634 and 'Umar's building activity in Jerusalem *ca.* 642 (all cited in the translation section below). However, for the first three notices, which occur before the Arab conquests, we cannot be sure whether they go back to Theophilus or to some other source that Agapius and Dionysius have in common, such as the Sergius of Rusafa whom Dionysius names as a source for this period (see below) and who may have been accessible to the chronicler of Siirt. The sign in the sky is a brief entry that is likely to travel easily between chronicles, so we are only left with the account of 'Umar's building activity in Jerusalem. This is quite close to the narratives of Theophanes, Agapius and Dionysius (see the entry thereon in the translation section below), but as a single notice it does not give us a sufficient basis for assessing how much and in what way the *Chronicle of Siirt* used Theophilus.

5. The Byzantine-Arab Chronicler of 741 (written in Latin)

This is a somewhat odd composition. Its content is as follows:

> *Spanish affairs* (9%): six cursory references to Visigothic kings (§§1–3, 5, 9, 14), dated according to the Spanish era, from the death of Reccared in 602 to the accession of Suinthila in 621. The Spanish dating era is no longer used after 640. The conquest of Spain is only mentioned among other triumphs of Walid's reign (§36), but there is an entry devoted to the battle of Toulouse in 721 (§42).
> *Byzantine affairs* (29%): brief notices on the emperors from the death of Phocas in 610 to the accession of Leo III in 717; only Heraclius receives any substantial treatment (62% of Byzantine notices; 18% of all notices).
> *Arab affairs* (62%): this is the major component of the chronicle and comprises entries on each ruler from Muhammad until Yazid II (720–24), giving the length and events of their reigns and often some personal description.

The initial references to Visigothic kings are drawn from Isidore of Seville's *History of the Goths*, but it can hardly be regarded as a continuation of

55 *Chron Siirt* LIV, 460.

Isidore since it concerns itself thereafter only with eastern rather than western rulers. One might instead see the work as a continuation of John of Biclar's *Chronicle*, which, as a contribution to the universal chronicle tradition, had a more eastern focus than Isidore's history and ended in the reign of Reccared, with whose death the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* begins. Moreover, both place the Byzantine emperors in a numerical scheme that goes back to Augustus. But the almost total absence of Spanish material, which John of Biclar does include in some measure, makes impossible any strict alignment with the Spanish historiographical tradition.[56]

The second distinctive feature of the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* is its favourable attitude towards the Arab caliphs, and not only towards the more renowned ones such as Mu'awiya and 'Abd al-Malik. Thus, though noting that he had little success in war, it characterises Yazid I as:

> A most pleasant man and deemed highly agreeable by all the peoples subject to his rule. He never, as is the wont of men, sought glory for himself because of his royal rank, but lived as a citizen along with all the common people (§28).[57]

The chronicler evidently relies upon a Near Eastern source, and this must have been composed in Syria, since the Umayyad caliphs are each described in a relatively positive vein, all reference to 'Ali is omitted, Mu'awiya II is presented as a legitimate and uncontested ruler (§29) and the rebel Yazid ibn al-Muhallab is labelled 'a font of wickedness' (§41). Another chronicle from eighth-century Spain, the *Hispanic Chronicle of 754*,[58] also makes use

56 See Diaz y Diaz, 'La transmisión textual del Biclarense', 66–67; Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, 1–10 (John of Biclar), 11–24 (Isidore of Seville), 25–42 (*Chron Byz-Arab 741*).

57 There is some parallel here with the short biographies of caliphs given by Muslim histories at the end of a ruler's reign; e.g. Tabari, 2.1271: 'In the view of the people of Syria, Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik was the most excellent of their caliphs. He built mosques – the mosque of Damascus and the mosque of Medina – and set up pulpits, was bountiful to the people and gave to the lepers, telling them not to beg from the people. To every cripple he gave a servant and to every blind person a guide. During his rule extensive conquests were achieved: Musa ibn Nusayr conquered Andalus, Qutayba conquered Kashgar and Muhammad ibn al-Qasim conquered Hind.'

58 This chronicle is much more straightforward. It follows in the footsteps of John of Biclar, for the scope of both is Mediterranean-wide but with an Iberian focus, and both treat matters ecclesiastical and secular. The author, an Andalusian cleric, generally disparages the emirs of Spain and makes clear his antipathy towards the invaders: 'Even if every limb were transformed into a tongue it would be beyond human nature to express the ruin of Spain and its many and great evils' (§45). See Pereira, *Crónicon mozarabe de 754*; Barkai, *Cristianos y musulmanes en la Espana medieval*, 19–27; Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*, 57–65; Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, 28–45.

of this Syrian source, and a comparison between the two Latin texts makes clear that it must have dealt with both Arab and Byzantine rulers – though the latter much more briefly – and was more extensive than either of its transmitters, both of which abbreviate it, at times substantially. One would expect this Syrian source to have been in Greek, since that was the usual language of exchange between east and west, and there are a few parallels between it and Byzantine chronicles.[59] Yet as regards Arab rulers, no Greek source displays such a positive attitude towards them as the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*. Dubler suggested it was written by a Spanish convert to Islam, but no Muslim would portray the rise of Islam as a rebellion, and surely no convert would refrain from passing some comment upon his newly adopted faith. The Syrian source of the Latin texts reports many of the same events and halts at the same point (*ca.* 750) as the common source of Theophanes, Agapius and Dionysius of Telmahre, and it is tempting to postulate that the Spanish chroniclers are dependent on a Latin translation of this common source. However, there are very few textual parallels[60] (though this could just be because the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle* is heavily abbreviating his Syrian source) and Theophanes, Agapius and Dionysius have much material not found in the Spanish texts.

A brief comment is required concerning the date of the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741*. The concluding notice is as follows:

> Then Yazid, king of the Saracens, his fourth year having unfolded, departed from this life, leaving the rule to his brother, Hisham by name; and he determined that after his brother the one born of his (Yazid's) own seed, named Walid, should rule (§43).

This takes us only to 724 and no later event is narrated, nor is the length of Hisham's reign given.[61] It is because the entry on Leo III's accession (in 717)

59 Parallels are indicated and sources discussed by Dubler, 'La crónica arabigo-bizantina de 741', 298–333, who, however, exaggerates both the similarities with other chronicles and the number of sources that would be circulating in Byzantium and Spain in the seventh century. In the opinion of Nöldeke, 'Epimetrum', the Syrian source was composed in Greek by a Miaphysite of Syria. An additional argument in favour of a Greek intermediary is the similarity in the rendering of Arab names between the two Latin texts and a short chronology of AD 818 in Greek (Schoene, *Eusebi chronicorum libri duo*, Appendix IV).

60 As opposed to notices on the same subject; such textual parallels as do exist are presented in the translation below.

61 Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*, 55, infers that the text must date to 744 or that the final notice was added later, not realising that the accession of Walid II after Hisham (d. 743) was pre-arranged by Yazid II. Collins' discussion of the text (53–57) is nevertheless very helpful.

contains the remark 'he took up the sceptre for 24 years' (i.e. until 741) that the text is associated with the year 741. But this suggests that the chronicler had intended to proceed further. The notices on Arab affairs in the *Hispanic Chronicle of 754* carry on in much the same vein until *ca.* 750, concluding with the accession to power of the Abbasids, and it is simpler to assume that the author is still relying on the same Syrian source rather than to posit some other Near Eastern source for the period 724–50. It may be, then, that we have the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* in a curtailed form and that it too originally continued until *ca.* 750.[62]

THEOPHILUS' CHRONICLE

From a comparison of Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius it becomes immediately apparent that their notices for the seventh and eighth century follow a chronological order. A few are misplaced, but the intention was clearly to progress through history from some point in the past up until the author's own day. Yet it is also evident from the frequency with which Dionysius and Agapius either begin a notice with 'at this time' or else disagree with each other on dating that Theophilus' work was not annalistic and was indeed rather sparing with dates.[63] This is an important point, for modern scholars often rely upon Theophanes for ascertaining the date of an event. But it is because he is writing an annalistic work that he puts notices under specific years, not necessarily because these notices were dated in the sources he is using. And in the case of the notices on eastern affairs, Theophanes often had to place them just where he thought best.

What the start and end point were for Theophilus is a difficult question. Since he is quoted as saying that there were 5197 years separating Adam from Seleucus, Theophilus is usually thought to have made Creation his starting point. But this is hardly cogent, for as an astrologer he would often have been obliged to make chronological calculations, or it could well be that

62 Though the observation that 'it is a descendant of the son of the latter (Marwan ibn al-Hakam) who holds their leadership up till now in our times' (§31) suggests that the chronicler is writing while the Marwanids are still in power, unless the reference is to the fact that Spain was governed by a descendant of Marwan.

63 Theophilus may have proceeded by simply narrating events, arranging his entries in chronological order as far as possible and occasionally giving synchronisms after the fashion of Eusebius; e.g. 'In the year 34/35/37 of the Arabs, 10/13 of Constans and 9 of 'Uthman, Mu'awiya prepared a naval expedition against Constantinople' (Theophanes, 345; Agapius, 483; Msyr 11.XI, 430/445; *Chron 1234*, 274).

he prefaced his chronography with some such computation.[64] Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius are clearly dependent on a common source from the notice on Abu Bakr's despatch of four generals in 634 onwards. Before this time Theophanes is able to obtain fairly full coverage from Byzantine sources and only occasionally has notices in common with Dionysius and Agapius. The first such notice concerns the Persians' crossing of the Euphrates *ca.* 610 to capture Syria, Palestine and Phoenicia. Dionysius and Agapius do share some notices for the years 590–610 (see in the translation below the accounts of the flight of Khusrau II to Maurice in 590 and Phocas' removal of Maurice in 602), though it cannot be excluded that the material common to Agapius and Dionysius comes from another source, such as Sergius of Rusafa, a nobleman of Edessa, whom Dionysius names as a source for this period and to whom Agapius, as bishop of nearby Manbij, might well have had access.[65] Yet it is certainly a more economical solution to assume that it is to the same source that Dionysius and Agapius are indebted for their common pre-630 material as for their post-630 material, and that this source was the Theophilus of Edessa that both of them specifically name as a source. If 590 was indeed Theophilus' starting point, then it may be that he was seeking to continue the *History* of Menander Protector (ended in 582) or John of Epiphania (572–91).[66] One cannot rule out an even earlier start date, but it would be extremely difficult to verify this, since Theophilus would inevitably use for the sixth century the same sources (John of Ephesus, Evagrius, John of Antioch, etc.) as his dependants, and so his narrative would in any case look very similar to theirs.

The last notice that Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius would seem to have in common concerns the manoeuvres of the caliph Marwan against Sulayman ibn Hisham and Dahhak the Kharijite in 746. Thereafter Theophanes begins to adduce new material, and we can conclude that this point marks the commencement of the activity of the continuator of the 'eastern source'. Agapius and the chronicler of 1234 correspond very closely in their narratives – to the extent that one could often pass for a translation

64 Agapius, 455, gives a calculation of the years from Adam before proceeding to relate *amr al-'arab*/'the affairs of the Arabs', but it seems somewhat corrupt. Conrad, 'The *Mawālī*', 388, is perhaps the most recent to state, without explanation, that Theophilus' chronicle began with Creation.

65 Msyr 11.III, 409/411: 'From this nobleman Sergius is derived (a part of) the chronicle of Dionysius of Telmahre (which extends) over six generations.' See Palmer, *WSC*, 98–99, 134 n. 306, 135 n. 308.

66 On whom see Treadgold, *Early Byzantine Historians*, 293–99, 308–10.

of the other – from 744 to 750, then a little less so until 754–55.[67] Both conclude with an account of the revolt of 'Abdallah ibn 'Ali, uncle of the first Abbasid caliph Abu l-'Abbas, against the latter's brother, Mansur, who defeated 'Abdallah ibn 'Ali with the help of his general Abu Muslim and became the second Abbasid caliph. The narratives of Agapius and Dionysius are very close, though the latter abbreviates it somewhat, and so we can be reasonably sure that the notice derives from Theophilus. Theophanes, although he has a number of the key points of the story (in particular that Mansur was in Mecca when Abu l-'Abbas died, that Abu Muslim engaged 'Abdallah near Nisibis, and that Abu Muslim was persuaded by blandishments and ruses to appear before Mansur who then killed him), includes numerous additional details that indicate he is not using the same source(s) at this point as Dionysius and Agapius. Hereafter the content of Dionysius' chronicle changes appreciably. The actions of Muslim authorities are noted, but only very briefly or only insofar as they impinged upon the Christian population. And Theophanes' account no longer bears any resemblance to that of either Agapius or Dionysius. So it would seem that Theophilus stopped at this point, with the consolidation of the rule of the caliph Mansur in 754–55.

As regards Theophilus' personal aims for his composition, we are lucky to have the report of what someone else thought he was doing. As noted above, in the preface to his own work Dionysius gives some attention to his predecessors 'who have written about earlier times'.[68] He reviews chronography and ecclesiastical history, then goes on to suggest that there had recently emerged a third type, namely 'narratives (*tash'yātā*) resembling ecclesiastical history'. What united such accounts was not their content; of the examples Dionysius cites – Daniel son of Moses of Tur 'Abdin, John son of Samuel of the west country, Theophilus of Edessa and Theodosius, metropolitan of Edessa – we know that Daniel wrote on church matters,[69] Theophilus mostly on secular events. Rather they were all distinguished,

67 It is not impossible that Agapius is using Dionysius directly, or a transmitter/continuator of Dionysius, but he does state explicitly that he is citing the actual writings of Theophilus (see above).

68 Dionysius' preface is preserved in Msyr 11.XX, 378/357–58.

69 Elias of Nisibis, 168, cites him for the election of the patriarch Athanasius Sandalaya (AH 122), the appearance of an unusual star (170 = AH 127) and the occurrence of an earthquake that destroyed the Jacobite church at Mabbug (171 = AH 131); and Dionysius himself cites him regarding the generosity of the Edessan magnate Athanasius bar Gumaye, a report that includes a long anecdotal account of how Athanasius came to build a baptistery at Edessa (Msyr 11.XVI, 447–49/475–77).

according to Dionysius, by their failure to maintain either the chronological rigour of the chronicle or the pursuit of causes and interrelationships that characterised ecclesiastical history: 'Those whom we have mentioned here set forth their accounts in a compartmentalised and discontinuous fashion, without paying strict heed to chronological accuracy or the order of succession of events.'[70] So they were narrative histories, but lacking a chronological or thematic thread.

Though perhaps a little harsh, this is a relatively apt characterisation of Theophilus. It is true that he does present his information in a largely chronological order, but he makes little effort to establish firm, reliable dates for each entry. For the seventh century in particular he makes heavy use of anecdotal material: Mu'awiya's demolition of the Colossus of Rhodes, Constans' dream that he would lose a naval engagement with the Arabs in 654, the rebel Shabur and the imperial envoy Sergius at Mu'awiya's court, the election by lot of Marwan ibn al-Hakam in 684, and so on. Each of these accounts constitutes a self-sufficient narrative unit bearing little connection to any other, and this, as Dionysius says, has the effect of making Theophilus' writing seem somewhat disjointed. Only with the description of the overthrow of the Umayyads are we given a more continuous relation where causal links between events are brought out. But this was perhaps not really Theophilus' fault; as was pleaded by a contemporary of his, who was also attempting to write a chronicle: 'We have traversed many places and not found any accurate composition, only miscellany.'[71] If Theophilus failed to produce a comprehensive narrative of events from 630–742,[72] it was for lack of material not of industry or talent. Despite his disparaging tone, Dionysius did make heavy use of Theophilus in his own work, certainly for information, and it is also likely that it played a part in the adoption by him and others of a narrative format in place of the staccato annalistic bulletins that were so much a feature of earlier Syriac chronography.[73]

When one examines the content of Theophilus' chronicle, one is at once struck by its concentration on secular events – warfare and diplomacy between the emperors and caliphs in particular. There are occasional reports

70 Msyr 10.XX, 378/358: *msaykā'īt wa-mfasqā'īt 'badw tash'īthūn kad lā nṭar l-ḥattītūtā d-zabnē aw l-naqīpūtā d-sū'rānē.*

71 *Chron Zuqnin*, 146–47.

72 He does much better for the period 743–54, whether because he was, as he said, 'a witness to these events', or because he had more written sources, or both.

73 A parallel, or even precursor, to the marriage of *ta'rīkh* (annals) and *akhbār* (narrative history) that we see in Islamic historiography in the mid-eighth century; see below.

on such matters as the collapse of a church after an earthquake, but there is no ecclesiastical material proper. This, plus the lack of interest in dates noted above, leads one to speculate whether Theophilus' intention might have been to compose a classicising history. This would certainly be in keeping with the impression that we have of him, namely that he was something of a Hellenophile, writing his astrological works in Greek, translating Homer and Galen, and naming his son Deukalion. Moreover, of the period he covers Theophilus devotes by far the most attention to the events of the last decade, from the murder of Walid II in 744 to the triumph of the Abbasids in 754, and he states clearly 'I was myself a constant witness of these wars and I would write things down so that nothing of them escaped me', or so Agapius claims in the passage cited above. Thus we have also the element of autopsy which was so important a feature of classicising history.[74] Finally, as noted above, he may well have been picking up where a previous classicising historian, Menander Protector, left off, which was a common practice for this genre (as opposed to starting from Creation or Jesus Christ).

THEOPHILUS' SOURCES

There has been almost no study at all of what might have been the sources used by Theophilus. It is not an easy question to answer, since we have no direct clues and, as noted above, the period from 630 to the 750s is an obscure one in Eastern Christian historiography. Looking at the subject matter of the chronicle, we can see that there are three principal types of material: Byzantine (notices about Byzantine emperors and dealings with the Muslims from a Byzantine perspective, especially battle narratives), Muslim (notices about caliphs, military campaigns and civil wars) and disasters (plagues, earthquakes, famines, floods etc.) or signs in the sky (comets, eclipses etc.). Though no firm conclusions can be drawn as yet, it seems worthwhile advancing some tentative observations about this material in the hope that it will stimulate further research in this direction.

1. Byzantine material: the 'eastern source'?

There are frequent laments in modern scholarship about the lack of Byzantine writing on the Arab conquests, and yet Theophilus presents us with

74 What is lacking is any evidence of that other notable trait of classicising history, the digression. This is also absent, however, from Nicephorus' work and he was certainly striving to write a classicising history.

some quite lengthy and detailed notices on this subject: the battles with the Arabs (of the patrician Sergius; of Theodore, brother of Heraclius; and of the general Baanes), Heraclius' farewell to Syria, the Arab conquest of Egypt, the Arab subjection of Syria and Mesopotamia, the Arab capture of Cyprus and Arwad, the naval battle of Phoenix, the failed rebellion of Shabur (supported by the Arabs) against Constans, the defeat of an Arab fleet in the 670s and successful Mardaite raids against the Arabs.[75] One could assume that these battle narratives were a unit in themselves, an account of Arab–Byzantine clashes that ended on a positive note, a few Byzantine triumphs that held out hope for the future recovery of this Christian regime. Otherwise one might suppose that Theophilus received them already collated with all the rest of the Byzantine material, most obviously the notices on Byzantine emperors, and postulate that he had to hand a full Byzantine chronicle covering the period *ca.* 630–750s or *ca.* 590–750s.

I label these accounts Byzantine simply because they describe events involving Byzantine characters and would seem to take the Byzantine side rather than the Arab. Indeed, a number of the battle accounts were evidently selected because they constitute victories for the Byzantines (e.g. Phoenix, Shabur's aborted revolt, the failed Arab naval advance on Constantinople and devastating Mardaite raids against the Arabs). Even with defeats, the tenor is pro-Byzantine; think, for example, of the image of the heroic patrician Sergius, who, having fallen off his horse, brushes aside offers of help from his soldiers, selflessly advising them rather to run and save themselves from the pursuing Arabs; or the loyal chamberlain Andrew who courageously stands his ground against the caliph Mu'awiya and lectures him on the art of rule.[76] Now the perspective of such narratives is rather at odds with Theophilus' documentation of the third Arab civil war and the Abbasid revolution (743–54), where his interests would seem to lie almost wholly with the Muslim Arab government. It is entirely plausible, then, that Theophilus did have a Byzantine chronicle at his disposal, and that he simply supplemented it and brought it up to date with material drawn from

75 For these narratives see the translation below under the years 634–36 (Sergius/Theodore/Baanes), 636–40 (Heraclius' farewell; capture of Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia), 649–50 (Cyprus and Arwad), 654–55 (Phoenix), 666–67 (Shabur), *ca.* 672 (defeat of Arab fleet) and 677 (Mardaites).

76 See the relevant notices in the translation section below, under the years 634 and 666–67. Speck, *Geteilte Dossier*, 170, takes this as an indication that the 'eastern source' was in Greek, which is possible (see next paragraph), but not cogent, for Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians of Palestine and Syria could also be expected to have held such a position, especially in the early decades of Muslim rule.

the Muslim sphere. I would also venture to suggest that we should identify this Byzantine chronicle with the aforementioned 'eastern source' and so dissociate it from Theophilus, if only for the practical purpose of trying to identify the latter's Byzantine source(s).[77]

Since Theophilus was highly accomplished at translating from Greek into Syriac, as noted above, it is tempting to assume that this 'eastern source' was in Greek, and there are some hints from Theophilus' dependants that this might have been the case.[78] But since Syriac was replete with Greek vocabulary and a high proportion of educated Syriac-speakers were competent in Greek, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate that a Syriac text is definitely derived from Greek, especially if, as here, one no longer has the original Syriac text. Who might have been the author of this 'eastern source'? He was without doubt a Chalcedonian, which would explain his pro-Byzantine leanings, but probably from the Levant rather than from a Byzantine-ruled region, for many of his notices, such as those about the sabotage of the Arab fleet in Tripoli and the encounter between Andrew and Shabur at the court of Mu'awiya, even if pro-Byzantine, reveal a fair degree of familiarity with what was happening in Muslim-ruled lands. One possible candidate is the aforementioned George Syncellus. We know, from his own admission, that he was intending to write a world chronicle up to his own day, and it was only ill health that prevented him from completing it past the reign of Diocletian (285–305). Possibly the latter portion (305–813) was more complete than is usually supposed, even if still a little rough and not properly edited.[79] We would then have to look for another continuator of

77 One could go so far as to make the 'eastern source'/Byzantine chronicle the principal source and Theophilus no more than the author of an addition on the third Arab civil war/Abbasid revolution, but Dionysius makes clear that Theophilus wrote a full chronicle and that it must have treated Christians as well as Muslims, since it contained what Dionysius considered to be pejorative remarks about Miaphysites ('His presentation of all events involving one of our number is fraudulent': Palmer, *WSC*, 92). Though one could argue that both chronicles were available separately to Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius, it is easier to explain how these three authors record much the same events in much the same order if we think of one overall chronicle (nevertheless combining a number of different sources) that was available to all three of them, whether directly or indirectly, and that they supplemented with different materials.

78 E.g. Sergius' characterisation of the eunuch Andrew as 'neither man nor woman nor *'wd't'rws* (= Greek *oudeteros*)', Heraclius' Greek farewell to Syria/*sōsou Syria*, and the pun in Emperor Constans' dream about Thessalonica/*thes allo nikēn* before the battle of Phoenix, though one could also argue that the Greek is there for literary effect. See also Speck, *Geteilte Dossier*, 52–53, 169–71, 185–87, 499–502 and 516–19, and n. 59 above, and notes 242, 261–63, 272, 276, 342, 392, 402–3, 682 and Appendix 1 n. 17 in the translation below.

79 This is effectively the view of Speck, *Geteilte Dossier*, esp. 516–19, though he sees

the 'eastern source', since it is unlikely that a copy of George's chronicle, halting at *ca.* 743, would have gone to Theophilus while another copy, which he extended to *ca.* 780, went to Theophanes.[80]

Another possible candidate for the authorship of the 'eastern source' is John son of Samuel, whom Dionysius describes as 'of the western country' (i.e. somewhere in the Levant, most likely the Mediterranean coastal region) and whom he places among those who wrote 'narratives resembling ecclesiastical history'.[81] This is the same category that Dionysius uses for Theophilus of Edessa, which both strengthens the argument (i.e. their styles are compatible) and weakens it (would not Dionysius have noticed if Theophilus was heavily reliant on John, though would he have said so if he did?)

A final matter that requires consideration is whether this 'eastern source' reached Theophanes, Dionysius and Agapius only via Theophilus of Edessa or by means of an intermediary. The former scenario seems most likely for Agapius and Dionysius, but it is possible that the 'eastern source' reached Theophanes independently, via someone who extended it until 780 (and translated it into Greek, if it was originally written in Syriac rather than in Greek). This and all questions to do with the authorship and nature of the 'eastern source' will, however, remain highly speculative until more work has been done on them, but it is interesting to observe that there was considerably more Byzantine history writing at this time than is usually allowed for.

2. Muslim material

Comparison between Theophilus and the Syriac *Chronicle of 819*, written by a monk of Qartmin monastery in northern Mesopotamia, reveals a number of close textual correspondences in quite a few of the notices on Muslim affairs and natural phenomena (listed in Appendix 2 below). It is not totally impossible that the *Chronicle of 819* was using Theophilus, but the two works have many notices that they do not share and they have a very

George's work as a loose dossier rather than a complete text. Cf. Huxley, 'Erudition', esp. 216–17. Palmer, *WSC*, 95, notes that Dionysius includes a certain George of Ragtaya in his review of past chroniclers and suggests this could this be George Syncellus.

80 Though Speck does argue for this, postulating a second dossier.

81 I would myself prefer to identify Dionysius' John bar Samuel with John of Antioch, since Dionysius does seem to be presenting the key exponents of the various genres, and John of Antioch fulfilled such a position for the Christian world chronicle. Dionysius mentions a John of Antioch, but this almost certainly intends John Malalas. On these two figures see Treadgold, *Early Byzantine Historians*, 311–29, 235–56.

different character,[82] and so it is much more likely that they are independent of each other, but have a common source, and this is evidently a Syriac chronicle that went up to the 730s, the point at which they cease to have any shared notices. It has been argued that this common source is John of Litarb (d. 737),[83] a stylite monk living in early eighth-century northern Syria. We still have the remnants of a lively correspondence that took place between John, Jacob, bishop of Edessa (d. 708), and George, bishop of the Arabs (d. 724), and he seems to have been a major Christian intellectual of early Islamic Syria.[84] His spiritual master, Jacob of Edessa, wrote a Eusebian-style chronicle up to 692, and it is reported that John continued it up to the time of his own death.[85] The only potential problem with this is that Dionysius remarks that 'part of his (John of Litarb's) book is conveyed (*ḥmīl*) in this book (of mine)',[86] and so he would effectively be using John twice (directly and via Theophilus of Edessa), though this is not impossible.[87]

One important aspect of this common source of Theophilus and the *Chronicle of 819* is that it draws our attention to how and in what form information about Muslim affairs circulated among Christians of the Near East. The items these two texts share (listed in Appendix 2 below) are particularly concerned with caliphs, and indeed it is the reigns and deeds of caliphs and their opponents that make up the bulk of the Muslim Arab material found in the various Christian chronological texts for the period *ca.* 630–750s. Should we think of one single 'history of the caliphs' (a sort of *Liber calipharum*) on which all Christian chronicles relied or of a multi-

82 The *Chronicle of 819* principally presents the history of the monastery of Qartmin, drawn from the latter's archives, and then mostly brief notices on local church affairs, natural disasters / phenomena, and the Muslim caliphs. See further Palmer, *WSC*, 75–84, and Palmer, 'Chroniques brèves'. Brooks, 'Sources of Theophanes', was the first to draw attention to this common source.

83 Palmer, 'Chroniques brèves', 70 and 79.

84 We have sixteen letters of Jacob to John (see my *Seeing Islam*, 741) and four letters of George to John (Wright, *Catalogue*, 2.988; on George see Tannous, *Between Christology and Kalam*).

85 Msyr 10.XX, 378/358: 'Others charted the succession of the years, namely Jacob of Edessa and John of Litarb'.

86 Msyr 11.XX, 461/500, unless Michael himself is speaking here.

87 If we want to assume that Dionysius' list of chroniclers in his introduction is a pretty comprehensive guide, then John son of Samuel is still an unknown and we could select him as our candidate for this common source (and not identify him with John of Antioch, as I suggested above), but of course the very fact that he is an unknown means that this does not advance our knowledge very much.

plicity of them?[88] On the one hand the material in Christian chronicles does follow a fairly standard pattern and they share the same basic contents. Yet on the other hand each chronicle possesses details that are not in the others. For example, the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* and the *Chronicle of 819* have very different notices on Walid I:

> Walid succeeded to power, (taking up) the sceptre of rule of the Saracens in accordance with what his father had arranged. He reigned for 9 years. (He was) a man of great prudence in arranging his armies to the extent that, though destitute of divine favour, he crushed the strength of almost all the neighbouring peoples adjoining him. He debilitated Byzantium in particular with constant raiding, brought the islands to the point of destruction and tamed the land of India by raids. In the western regions, through a general of his army by the name of Musa, he attacked and conquered the kingdom of the Goths established in Spain with ancient solidity, and having cast out their rule he imposed tribute. So, waging all things successfully, he (Walid) gave an end to his life in the ninth year of his rule, having already seen the riches of all the peoples displayed to him. (*Chron Byz-Arab 741*, §36)

> A devious man, who increased the exactions and hardships more than all his predecessors; he completely wiped out robbers and bandits; and he built a city and called it 'Ayn Gara. (*Chron 819*, 14)

A recent article by Sean Anthony examined the account of the assassination of 'Umar I in Theophanes, Agapius and Dionysius and compared it with a number of Muslim depictions of this event, concluding that the latter served as the basis for the former.[89] Because Anthony just takes the one incident and does not deal with these texts as a whole, he assumed that it was Dionysius who inserted the Muslim material, since Theophanes and Agapius had much shorter notices. However, the latter two authors very commonly abbreviate Theophilus and there are enough similarities between their and Dionysius' account (see the translation below, under the year 644) to make it clear that all three are using, whether directly or indirectly, a common source. But was this common source Theophilus or an author that he was drawing upon; to put it another way, was Theophilus responsible for incorporating the Muslim material in his work or was he reliant upon a

88 Note that Elias of Nisibis cites two anonymous sources on Muslim history: a 'chronicle of the kings of the Arabs' and a 'chronicle of the Arabs' (Borrut, 'La circulation de l'information historique', 145): unless both titles refer to the same source.

89 'The Syriac account of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre on the assassination of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.'

chronicle that had already done this work for him?[90] Since he worked as an astrologer at the Abbasid court, it is very likely that he spoke and read Arabic and he would have been in a good position to procure Arabic books. It is certainly plausible, then, that we should regard him as the one who made all of this material on the Muslim regime available to later chroniclers.

At this point, however, one should note that there are two quite distinct types of Muslim material in Theophilus: the fairly short and simple notices on individual caliphs up to and including Hisham (724–43), which are pithy and unconnected, and the very full and detailed account of events from 743–54, which is presented as a continuous narrative and includes causal explanations. The former could travel orally and so, though they might derive ultimately from a Muslim source, could be picked up by a Christian writer who was not intimately familiar with Muslim affairs or writings. The latter presume deep acquaintance with Muslim politics and very likely with Muslim historical texts.[91] When Theophilus says, in the words of Agapius cited above, that 'I was myself a constant witness of these wars', one assumes that it is to the events of 743–54 that he is referring, and it is this section that I would almost certainly attribute to Theophilus' own hand. How much of the earlier Muslim material, on the succession of the caliphs, he put together and how much he simply took over from an earlier author is a question that cannot at present be answered.

THE CIRCULATION OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY ISLAM

One reasonably sure conclusion that could be inferred from the above discussion is, first, that a lot more historical material was circulating between the Muslim and Christian communities than is usually assumed[92] and, secondly, that there was already a fairly advanced tradition of Muslim history-writing by the mid-eighth century. We get a hint of the former point from one of our

90 Could, for example, the 'eastern source' have included Muslim as well as Byzantine material? In this case Theophilus would have done no more than add material on the third Arab civil war and the Abbasid revolution to a very full chronicle that covered Muslim and Byzantine politics up to *ca.* 743.

91 See the example I give in n. 876 in the translation section below, on the massacre of the Umayyads, where there is almost word-for-word equivalence with the account of the Muslim historian Ya'qubi.

92 For some interesting thoughts along these lines see Conrad, 'The *Mawālī*'. See also Figure 1 below.

earliest Christian caliphal histories (composed *ca.* 724–25), which is little more than a list of caliphs and their time in office, but which would appear, from its use of the lunar calendar[93] (Yazid II died in AH 104–05) and of Arabic technical terms (*rasūl*/'messenger' and *fitna*/'civil war'), to derive from an Arabic original:

> A notice of the life of Mḥmṭ the messenger (*r...ā*)[94] of God, after he had entered his city and three months before he entered it, from his first year; and how long each king lived who arose after him over the Muslims once they had taken power; and how long there was dissension (*ptnā*)[95] among them.
> Three months before Mḥmd came.[96]
> And Mḥmd lived ten years (more).
> And Abu Bakr son of Abu Quhafa: 2 years and 6 months.
> And 'Umar son of Kattab: 10 years and 3 months.
> And 'Uthman son of 'Affan: 12 years.
> And dissension after 'Uthman: 5 years and 4 months.
> And Ma'wiyā son of Abu Syfan: 19 years and 2 months.
> And Yazid son of Ma'wiyā: 3 years and 8 months.
> And dissension after Yazid: 9 months.
> And Marwan son of Ḥakam: 9 months.
> And 'Abd al-Malik son of Marwan: 21 years and 1 month.
> Walid bar 'Abd al-Malik: 9 years and 8 months.
> And Sulayman son of 'Abd al-Malik: 2 years and 9 months.
> And 'Umar son of 'Abd al-'Aziz: 2 years and 5 months.
> And Yazid son of 'Abd al-Malik: 4 years and 1 month and 2 days.
> The total of all these years is 104, and 5 months and 2 days. (*Chron 724*, 155)

What can we say about the second conclusion, namely that there was already a fairly advanced tradition of Muslim history-writing by the mid-eighth century? At this time we can observe two different styles: compilations of anecdotes on a particular topic, such as 'The Campaigns of the Prophet', 'The Battle of Siffin', 'The Murder of Hujr ibn 'Adi' and

93 The total given at the end of the list, 104 years and 5 months and 2 days, only works if one counts in lunar years: Yazid II died in AH 104–5/724, but 104 solar years would take one into AD 727.

94 A later hand has tried to erase this word, which is clearly meant to be Arabic *rasūl*/'messenger'.

95 This represents the Arabic word *fitna*, which denotes civil discord.

96 The 'three months before Mḥmṭ came' presumably refers to the interval between the beginning of the Islamic calendar on 16 July 622 and the date of Muhammad's arrival in Medina on 24 September 622. See Tabari, 1.1255–56, where it is explained that though Muhammad's emigration to Medina is the starting point of Muslim chronology, the fact that he made it in the third month of the year means that 'year 1' begins 2½ months earlier.

'The Life of Mu'awiya',[97] and year-by-year lists of holders of high office and notable events.[98] Gradually these two genres began to influence each other. There was an increasing emphasis on giving some chronological order to narratives of early Islam;[99] conversely and coincidentally, there was a move to flesh out lists compiled from government records that had been kept since probably the reign of Mu'awiya (661–80),[100] and that could include caliphs, governors, judges, leaders of the pilgrimage, commanders of the summer and winter campaigns into Byzantine territory, and so on.[101] Names of those who had fallen in battle may also have been inscribed since they had a bearing upon the distribution of stipends.[102] Then, in the early ninth century, we begin to get our first chronicles (*ta'rīkh 'alā l-sinīn*): those of al-Haytham ibn 'Adi (d. 822) and Abu Hassan al-Ziyadi (d. 857), and, our first extant example, that of Khalifa ibn Khayyat (d. 854).[103] In these, and especially in the 'History of the Prophets and Kings' of Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), we see a full marriage between historical narratives and official annals.[104]

It is not impossible that Muslim historians hit upon using an annalistic style of presentation independently,[105] but since the technique has a

97 These and other examples are given in Faruqi, *Early Muslim Historiography*, 214–302. Compare the extant work on the 'Battle of Siffin' by Nasr ibn Muzahim al-Minqari (d. 828). Moreover, Mourad, 'Al-Azdi', has recently shown that the 'Conquest of Syria' by Abu Mikhnaf al-Azdi (d. 774) substantially survives in the work of its later redactors, such as Abu Isma'il al-Azdi (d. *ca.* 820). See also Elad, 'Beginnings of Historical Writing'; Borrut, *Entre Mémoire et Pouvoir*.

98 The earliest that we can discern is by Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 742), who served the Umayyad regime in various departments of their administration. On him see Duri, *Historical Writing*, 95–121, and see 115–16 for his list of the reigns of the caliphs.

99 Jones, 'The Chronology of the *Maghāzī*' (that is, of the campaigns of the prophet Muhammad).

100 Papyri, inscriptions and coins suggest that an effective Umayyad administration was in place at a very early date; see Donner, 'The Formation of the Islamic State'.

101 Rotter, 'Abu Zur'a al-Dimashqi'; Schacht, *Origins*, 100 (on the early provenance of Kindi's lists).

102 See Tabari, 1.2496 (on *'irafat*). Sellheim ('Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte', 73–77) and Schacht ('Mūsā ibn 'Uqba', 288–300) have discerned name-lists as a discrete element in Muhammad's biography.

103 Duri, *Historical Writing*, 53–54 (Haytham); Sezgin, *GAS*, 316 (Abu Hassan); Schacht in *Arabica* 16 (1969), 79f. (Ibn Khayyat).

104 That is, between *akhbār* and *ta'rīkh*; see further Crone, *Slaves*, introduction. On early Islamic historiography in general see Donner, *Narratives*; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 354–94.

105 It could, for example, originate in pre-Islamic practice; cf. Tabari, 1.1254: 'When they

considerable pedigree in the Middle East, it is worth examining the possibility of borrowing from the other cultures existing in the region. There is no firm evidence of Iranian authors producing annalistic writings;[106] neither did Nestorians until Elias of Nisibis (d. 1050).[107] Annalistic techniques were, of course, deployed by writers in the Greco-Roman tradition as far back as Thucydides, who was himself probably confirming the practice of individual cities before him. Any direct influence upon the Arabic tradition seems unlikely, however, given the conspicuous absence of Arabic translations of Byzantine historical works.[108] Moreover, the Eusebian tradition of chronography in Greek appears to have faltered after the efforts of Panadorus and Anianus in the fifth century,[109] and Greek historical writing as a whole sank into the doldrums with the onset of Arab rule, as noted above. On its re-emergence in the late eighth and early ninth century, it does evince an interest in precise chronological narrative, as is exemplified by the chronicle of Theophanes, but an indebtedness to some Syriac or Arabic model is readily apparent.[110]

West Syrian history-writing, on the other hand, suffered far less disruption.[111] The royal annals of Edessa inspired a subsequent episcopal tradition of annalistic record-keeping, of which we find extracts in chronological works of the mid-sixth and mid-seventh century.[112] At monasteries such as Qenneshre and Qartmin in northern Mesopotamia, the tradition was continued

dated an event, they did so from the like of a drought which occurred in some part of their country, a barren year which befell them, the term of a governor who ruled over them, or an event the news of which became widespread among them.' The cataclysmic nature of the *hijra* could have served to halt the constant revision of *termini a quo* by furnishing the ultimate *point de repère*.

106 Spuler, 'The Evolution of Persian Historiography', 126–32; Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 59ff. But see Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 564–65 ('Sasanian royal annals').

107 Nestorians seem to have favoured a biographical arrangement of material; cf. the anonymous *Chronicle of Khuzistan* and the *Chronicle of Siirt* (see bibliography).

108 Steinschneider, *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*, fails to signal any.

109 The *Chronicon Paschale*, which goes up to 630, is obsessed with chronological computations, even coming up with its own system, but does not seem to have enjoyed wide circulation or influence.

110 Mango, 'The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography', 363–69.

111 Both the *Chronicle of 819* and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* have a gap for the years AG 976–88/664–77 (Palmer, *WSC*, 59 and 77), but a number of notices on natural phenomena shared by Theophanes, 353–55, and Msyr 11.XIII, 436/456–57, show that there was still some activity.

112 Debié, 'Record Keeping and Chronicle Writing in Antioch and Edessa'.

until the time of Dionysius of Telmahre, who gave it new vigour.[113] After the fashion of Eusebius, 'other men charted the succession of years, namely Jacob of Edessa and John the stylite of Litarb', as noted above. Language constituted no barrier to exchange between Syrian and Arab cultures. Many Arabs, Muslim as well as Christian, knew Syriac, and West Syrian Christians made use of Arabic very early on as a language of scholarship.[114] So if one were to posit extraneous rather than indigenous origins for the annalistic form in Muslim historiography, then it is to the West Syrian historical tradition that one should look.

It is worth emphasising, in conclusion, that the lines between Christian and Muslim were not drawn so rigidly as often tends to be assumed, either in terms of definitions or in terms of social relations. It is true that Christians living in the Byzantine realm were to a large degree insulated from contact with Muslims, but for those living under the latter's rule it was a different story. The claim of the Mesopotamian monk John bar Penkaye that 'there was no distinction between pagan and Christian, the believer was not known from a Jew' may be exaggerated,[115] but it is nevertheless instructive. The initial indifference of the Muslims to divisions among the peoples whom they conquered, when compounded with the flight and enslavement of an appreciable proportion of the population and with the elimination of internal borders across a huge area extending from north-west Africa to India, meant that there was considerable human interaction across social, ethnic and religious lines. This was especially true for those who sought employment in the bustling cosmopolitan garrison cities of the new rulers, where one was exposed to contact with men of very diverse origin, creed and status. In addition, there were the widespread phenomena of conversion and apostasy, of inter-confessional marriage and festival attendance, of commercial contacts and public debate, all of which served to break down sectarian barriers.

An excellent illustration of this point is the author of the chronicle that I translate in this volume, Theophilus of Edessa. He began his life in Edessa, the key city of Syriac Christianity, yet ended up in Baghdad, the heart of

113 For example, the work of earlier authors is clear in the *Chronicle of 819* (Palmer, 'Chroniques brèves', and Brooks, 'Sources of Theophanes and Syriac Chroniclers').

114 Griffith, 'Stephen of Ramla and the Christian Kerygma in Arabic in Ninth Century Palestine'. For a later example of such sharing of historical ideas see Borrut, 'La circulation de l'information historique'.

115 John bar Penkaye, 151/179. I expand upon this point in the first two chapters of my *Seeing Islam*.

the early Abbasid Empire. He advised Muslim caliphs on astrological affairs and his scientific writings were appreciated by later Muslim astrologers, but excerpts from them also entered into a Byzantine astrological corpus. He translated works of Galen and Homer into Syriac, but seemed also to be comfortable with writing a history of Muslim caliphs and rebels in the Near East. Theophilus cannot, therefore, be viewed as simply a Christian who writes under Muslim rule; he is evidently a highly educated man, still influenced by the traditions of Antiquity as well as cognisant with the culture of his employers.

None of this is to say that religious affiliation did not count for a great deal; it obviously did. But it did not exert, in some predictable fashion, an all-encompassing power to direct patterns of social relations in such a way as to prevent external influence or positive response to that influence. Religious specialists of the various confessions in the Near East might well have wished that this were the case, but the region was and remained too diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, history, language and so on for that ever to happen.

NOTES ON TRANSLATION

In what follows I translate the notices common to Theophilus' three dependants – Theophanes,[116] Agapius and Dionysius (as represented by Michael the Syrian and/or the *Chronicle of 1234*). Since Theophilus' chronicle is not itself extant, this is the only way to convey the content of this work. There are three key reasons for carrying out this exercise. First, it gives greater prominence to a pivotal text in the historiography of the early Islamic period, one that sheds light on both the Christian and Muslim communities of this comparatively poorly documented age. Secondly, it makes accessible material for the period 590–750s that was not previously translated into English (listed below). Thirdly, it draws attention to the fact that the question of how later chroniclers used Theophilus and how chronological information reached Theophilus is a lot more complicated than has generally been supposed. Often it has just been assumed that all information about 'eastern' affairs (i.e. occurring in Muslim-ruled lands) in Theophanes, Agapius and

116 As I note above, Theophanes might only be indirectly dependent upon Theophilus, but that would require further investigation to determine and for the purposes of this volume I class him with Agapius and Dionysius as a dependant of Theophilus, without specifying whether directly or indirectly so.

Dionysius must derive from Theophilus and that such information as does come from Theophilus is copied by his three dependants without much revision. Presenting next to one another the notices of Theophanes, Agapius and Dionysius for each event vividly illustrates the very different ways these three chroniclers have used Theophilus. I have also cross-referenced the notices to other texts so as to aid investigation into the ways in which historical material was circulating in the seventh- and eighth-century Near East.

The texts

The following are translated in this work; for information about all other primary sources cited please see the bibliography.

Agapius of Manbij, *Kitab al-'Unwan*: this Arabic text is edited with French translation by A.A. Vasiliev, 'Kitab al-'Unvan, histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj', Part 2.2, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912), 399–547 (covering the years 380–761).[117] I translate from Vasiliev's Arabic text. In his day the unique manuscript was defective in a number of places, but it would appear to have been restored since then (see Appendix 3 below). Much more is now readable and I incorporate these new insights into my translation. Except for a Muslim historical work, Agapius seems to make little recourse to any other source besides Theophilus for the period 590–750s, and so what is translated below represents almost the whole of his text for this period.

Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: this Syriac text is edited with French translation by J.B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Miaphysite d'Antioche, 1166–99* (Paris, 1901–10). I translate from Chabot's Syriac text (in vol. 4, Paris, 1910), checking it where necessary against the facsimile of the Aleppo manuscript of Michael (published by Gorgias Press, 2009, as the first volume of a series on Michael's chronicle, of which the general editor is George Kiraz). Michael arranges his notices in three columns, one devoted to church matters and the other two catering for political affairs, natural disasters and the like. For ecclesiastical matters Michael seems to have had access to a variety of sources and archives, but for civil matters he relies very heavily on Theophilus (via Dionysius of Telmahre's history), and so what is translated below represents most of Michael's text

117 An English translation is given in http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/morefathers.html, but it is made from Vasiliev's French translation by Google machine translator, and is intended just as a rough guide for those who do not read French.

on this subject, except for some of the natural phenomena (earthquakes, eclipses, comets), in which Michael seems to have taken a special interest and concerning which he assiduously sought out additional material.

Chronicle of 1234: this Syriac text was edited with a Latin translation by J.B. Chabot, *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (CSCO 81/109 *scr. syri* 36/56; Paris, 1916/1937). It is available in an English translation for the years 582–717 (Palmer, *WSC*, 111–221), and in French for the period after 775 (A. Abouna, CSCO 354 *scr. syri* 154; Louvain, 1974). But the period 717–75 is still only available in Latin, and so my translation here represents the first translation into a modern language. The translation of Palmer is quite free (as befits the fact that he was trying to make a large body of text accessible and readable) and so I have done my own translations, making it as close to the text as is stylistically possible, except for a few very long passages, where readability is more important, and so I have then used Palmer's translation (as noted in the footnotes).[118] The chronicler of 1234 seems to make very little recourse to any other source besides Theophilus (via Dionysius of Telmahre's history) for civil matters of the period 590–750s, except for the Arab conquests and the first Arab civil war, for which he draws on Muslim sources, and so what is translated below represents almost all of his non-ecclesiastical notices for this period.

Theophanes' *Chronographia*: this Greek text is fully available in English in the translation of Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (*The Chronicle of Theophanes*, Oxford, 1997) and I am very grateful to them for allowing me to quote from it here. For Byzantine affairs Theophanes does have access to other sources, and so what is presented below is principally the information that Theophanes gives us on eastern affairs.

Working principles

I have assembled here all and only those notices that feature in, and share similar ingredients with, two or all of Theophilus' three dependants. Notices that might seem by their content to derive from an eastern source but that are only found in one of Theophilus' three dependants I give separately within curly brackets. Notices in Michael the Syrian and the *Chronicle of 1234*, but not in Theophanes or Agapius, are excluded since they very likely only go back to Dionysius. Theophanes and Agapius give notices from Theophilus mostly in the same order, and I follow this order here.

118 Even then I sometimes make very small changes, usually either for clarification, to make the translation closer to the Syriac text or to supply words that have been omitted.

Theophanes' chronicle has one or more Byzantine sources in common with the *Short History* of Nicephorus, patriarch of Constantinople (806–15). Since I am only interested here in Theophilus' chronicle and since both Theophanes' and Nicephorus' works are available in English, I will not cite in full a notice of Theophanes when he is clearly dependent upon a Byzantine source and not on Theophilus, but I will only cite enough to give a sense of the narrative and give the reference to the corresponding passage in Nicephorus.

For Dionysius I cite the text of both the *Chronicle of 1234* and of Michael the Syrian and I place the words[119] that are common to both texts in boldface so as to make clear the degree to which and the ways in which Msyr and *Chron 1234* adapt Dionysius. However, where the notices of Dionysius' dependants are both very long and close, I will, for the sake of avoiding excessive repetition, give the text of the fullest notice.

Where other historical sources record the same event, this will be indicated in the footnotes. Where another historical work actually betrays some textual correspondence with the notice of one or more of Theophilus' dependants, then that notice is translated after those of Theophilus' dependants. As regards Muslim Arabic sources, however, I have not attempted to cross-reference to all or many of them, since they are too numerous and mostly interdependent. Instead, I have cited the relevant entry in the *Annali* and *Chronographia* of Leone Caetani, who refers to all the relevant Arabic sources that were then available to him. I also frequently cite Tabari, since this is available for non-Arabists to consult in English translation, and Ibn Khayyat (d. *ca.* 854), because he wrote the earliest extant Muslim Arabic chronicle and this was not available to Caetani. I have only made recourse to other Arabic sources when they have specific information not found elsewhere. This method of dealing with the Arabic sources will probably arouse the ire of some Arabists/Islamicists, but I beg their indulgence and ask them to remember that this volume is meant to be accessible to scholars and students in other disciplines, who may well be put off by the heavy annotative practices common in Islamic history publications.

Place names

I have explained in the footnotes the location of the lesser-known toponyms mentioned in this chronicle, but for the majority I refer the reader to the

119 When they are from the same root, even if in different forms (i.e. noun, adjective, verb, participle, etc.).