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George Synkellos' Palestinian Connection and the Greek Chronicle Tradition

ABSTRACT: The hypothesis about George Synkellos' Syro-Palestinian origins relates in a confused way to that of the lost Eastern source of Theophanes, to the hypothesis that the chronicle attributed to Theophanes was in fact written by Synkellos, and to the hypothesis about Syriac mediation in the transmission of the Greek chronicle tradition throughout the so-called Dark Ages. The current state of research calls for a new look at this situation and invites us to reexamine from a different perspective the history of the Greek chronicle tradition in Byzantium.

KEYWORDS: George Synkellos; Theophanes Confessor; Byzantine Chronography; Byzantine Chronicle

There is no doubt that the chronicle attributed to Theophanes the Confessor is one of the most conspicuous literary works of the Byzantine millennium. In addition to many other issues, modern scholarship has tended to focus on its chronology, distinguishing it from its predecessors and successors in Greek, and thus establishing a link with the chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, which unfortunately has only reached us indirectly, through Latin and Armenian translations, Syriac epitomes and quotes in Greek works¹. Since this relationship between the works of Eusebius and Theophanes was somewhat difficult to explain after a break of nearly five hundred years without clear evidence of chronicles of Eusebian style in Greek, in a very influential article Cyril Mango hypothesized that Theophanes received the Eusebian legacy through his friend George Synkellos. Synkellos allegedly had a good knowledge of the Syriac chronicle tradition, which had apparently faithfully preserved the Eusebian legacy during the so-called Dark Ages². Of Mango's prolific and important research on Theophanes, this is the aspect that I would like to address.

To highlight Theophanes' uniqueness, Mango characterized his work by the breadth of its scope and its chronological structure³. He sought in vain Greek models of this chronological structure in Malalas, the Paschal Chronicle and other fragmentary works transmitted indirectly, and even in hypothetical works, like those of Trajan the Patrician, the so-called Great Chronographer and the common source of Theophanes and the patriarch Nikephoros for the years 668–769. He also denied

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¹ For Eusebius, see A. A. MOSSHAMMER, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and the Greek Chronographic Tradition*. Lewisburg – London 1979; B. CROKE, *The Originality of Eusebius' Chronicle*. *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982) 195–200; R. W. BURGESS, *Studies in Eusebian and Post-Eusebian Chronography*. Stuttgart 1999; W. WITAKOWSKI, *The Chronicle of Eusebius: Its Type and Continuation in Syriac Historiography*. *Aram* 12 (2000) 419–437; A. HILKENS, *Eusebius of Caesarea* (d. AD 340), in: *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 and its Sources (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 272)*. Leuven 2018, 113–128. For Jerome's Latin translation see *Die Chronik des Hieronymus, Teil 1: Text* (ed. R. Helm [GCS 47]. Berlin 1956); for the Armenian version of the chronography see *Eusebius Caesariensis. Werke. Band 5: Die Chronik* (ed. J. KARST [GCS 20], Leipzig 1911); *Eusèbe de Césarée. Chronique I* (ed. A. COHEN-SKALLI. Paris 2020, 47–49).

² C. MANGO, *The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography*. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12/13 (1988/89) 360–72; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (transl. C. MANGO – R. SCOTT. Oxford 1997, liv–lv).

³ MANGO, *Tradition* 368–69. I. ŠEVČENKO, *The Search for the Past in Byzantium around the Year 800*. *DOP* 46 (1992) 279–93, 288 and 293, also considers the breadth of scope of Synkellos' chronography as a unique element within the panorama of the Byzantine chronicles.

the possibility that Synkellos might have consulted Eusebius directly⁴. Mango therefore deduced that Theophanes must have been almost a “renaissance man”, although he concluded that Theophanes’ biographies completely ruled out the idea that he had an exceptional education and level of culture. More importantly, given his shortcomings in this respect, Theophanes could not even claim—according to Mango—to have been the one to bring back Greek chronicle tradition through Syriac intermediation. Rather, his chronicle should be attributed to his friend George Synkellos, whose privileged contacts with the Syro-Palestinian area would have allowed him to imbibe the “Syriac tradition” that would have kept the Greek chronicle alive during the Dark Ages⁵.

Mango’s approach was firmly grounded in his belief that the Byzantine chronicle was a “cut and paste” genre of an unavoidable and frustrating usefulness as a historical source. He also highlighted this feature of the genre, which in no way is specific to Theophanes or to any other Greek language chronicler, marking a clear path for future research: “Granted that the Chronicle [of Theophanes] is a file, its study is in a very real sense the study of its sources.”⁶ While Synkellos’ work has been primarily seen as a most valuable anthology of citations of the first Christian chroniclers, Julius Africanus and Eusebius⁷, Theophanes’ work has received considerable attention as a historical source of first order on the events it deals with, in particular dating back to the 7th–9th centuries, and it has been thoroughly scrutinized from this point of view. In fact, Theophanes had long been analysed from this perspective before Mango. Thus, the hypothesis of the “Palestinian connection” arose from an old *Quellenforschung* problem—the so-called theory of the “Eastern source” or “lost Oriental chronicle” as formulated by Brooks in 1906—which was reinterpreted by Mango as a problem relating to literary models⁸. The way in which scholars had approached Theophanes’ work was totally conditioned by the study of its sources.

We can go back even further to trace the bases of this hypothesis to the belief held by Gelzer (who looked down on Synkellos and the cultural climate of 9th-century Constantinople) that Synkellos had travelled through Palestina and was even of Palestinian origin⁹. From the perspective of Byzantine studies, Gelzer’s hypothesis was the basis for a much needed re-evaluation of the information on the region contained in Theophanes’ chronicle, which might be understood as based on Synkellos’ own experiences. The shortage of Greek sources for the 7th–8th centuries, a key component of the “Eastern source” theory, led to the belief that Synkellos and Theophanes must have used Syriac sources. There has been a considerable effort amongst scholars to identify these sources in recent decades¹⁰. This belief also led Mango to assume that Synkellos’ and Theophanes’

⁴ Adler and Tuffin do not dismiss it point blank: “Since the Greek text of the chronicle is now known only in scattered excerpts preserved by Synkellos and a few other Byzantine chronicles, the Greek transmission of the work in the ninth century is a matter of legitimate doubt”, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (transl. W. ADLER – P. TUFFIN. Oxford 2002, lxviii). Mosshammer concluded that the Eusebian fragments of Synkellos and the Armenian translation of Eusebius depended on a very similar or identical Greek original, *Georgii Syncelli Ecloga chronographica* (ed. A. A. MOSSHAMMER. Leipzig 1984, xxvi); W. ADLER, *Time Immemorial: Archaic History and Its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus*. Washington DC 1989, suggested that Synkellos consulted these sources in compilations of *excerpta*. An example can be found in the *Eklogē historiōn* (ed. J. A. CRAMER, *Anecdota Graeca* II. Oxford 1839, 114–63).

⁵ C. MANGO, *Who Wrote the Chronicle of Theophanes?* *ZRVI* 18 (1978) 9–17.

⁶ *The Chronicle of Theophanes* (transl. C. MANGO – R. SCOTT, lxxiv).

⁷ Synkellos, the Paschal Chronicle and the so-called Anonymus Matritensis (9th century) are in fact the main Greek witnesses to Eusebius’ chronicle.

⁸ MANGO, *Tradition*.

⁹ H. GELZER, *Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie* II.1. Leipzig 1885, 179–82.

¹⁰ Since the proposal by E. W. BROOKS, *The sources of Theophanes and the Syriac Chroniclers*. *BZ* 15 (1906) 578–87, the most significant contributions to note are: L. I. CONRAD, *Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition*. *BF* 15 (1990) 1–44, *The Conquest of Arwād: a Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East*, in: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Volume 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron – L. I. Conrad. Princeton, NJ 1992, and R. G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and*

chronicle models must have been Syriac. This misunderstanding has led to an accumulation of serious inconsistencies.

The influence of this paradigm is so profound that in 2008 an important reference work claimed that “the Syriac tradition probably contributed to the re-emergence of Greek historiography, since George, a monk from Palestine, brought to Constantinople in the late eighth century a translation of a contemporary eastern chronicle”¹¹. George Synkellos' Palestinian origins are fully assumed by the author of the only recent survey of middle Byzantine historiography¹², his Syrio-Palestinian connections are welcomed by the translators of his chronography¹³, and due to Mango's reputation as a leading scholar, these assumptions have had a significant impact outside of Byzantine studies. This is evident in the most important 21st-century contribution to the history of the chronicle genre in antiquity and the Middle Ages¹⁴. Quite recently, Torgerson writes that “what we can state with confidence is that the text (Synkellos-Theophanes work) was written in a way that strongly encouraged an attentive reader to think that its author had close ties to Syria-Palestina to the degree as saw those Christians as part of the Byzantine οἰκουμένη (...) the *Chronographia* associates its author with Syria-Palestine, indicating the author spent time within that region either as a traveller, a resident, or a native-born person”¹⁵. It is remarkable that, more than a century later and with a lot of specialized literature in between, we are at the same point as Gelzer. This perhaps justifies us revisiting the issue in search of something we may be doing wrong.

THE MANGO HYPOTHESIS IN CONTEXT: ORIGIN, CONTENT, AND IMPLICATIONS

Mango's theory that Synkellos wrote the chronicle attributed to Theophanes was based on what he deemed to be discrepancies between biographies of Theophanes and the information contained in the chronicle itself, in particular its preface¹⁶. He was firmly convinced that Gelzer was right in

Zoroastrian writings on early Islam. Princeton 1997, 631–71. Their conclusions have been accepted by most Byzantinists. See, for example, W. BRANDES, *Der frühe Islam in der byzantinischen Historiographie. Anmerkungen zur Quellenproblematik der Chronographia des Theophanes*, in: *Jenseits der Grenzen. Beiträge zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. H. Leppin – H. Schlang-Schöningen – A. Goltz. Berlin 2009, 313–44; J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*. Oxford 2010, 192–236; W. T. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*. Basingstoke 2013, 50–63, not to mention the plethora of articles and reference works that echo this view, inside and outside of Byzantine studies.

¹¹ M. ANGOLD – M. WHITBY, *Historiography*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. Jeffreys et al. Oxford 2008, 838–52, 842. See also M. JANKOWIAK, *Framing Universal History: Syncellus' Canon and Theophanes' Rubrics*, in: *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. M. Jankowiak – F. Montinaro (*TM* 19). Paris 2015, 53–72, 54–55: “George Syncellus, who was a Palestinian monk before moving to Constantinople ...”

¹² Although TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, is not focused on literary forms and models, but on biographical data, historical content, and sources. See also TREADGOLD, *The Life and Wider Significance of George Syncellus*, in: *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 9–30. The only survey of Byzantine historiography that critically addresses the hypothetical Palestinian origin (or sojourn) of Synkellos is, to my knowledge, that of A. KARPOZILOS, *Byzantinoi historikoi kai chronographoi. Tomos B (8os–10os ai.)*. Athens 2002, 100–107.

¹³ *The Chronography of George Synkellos* (transl. W. ADLER – P. TUFFIN, lxxviii–lxxix).

¹⁴ R. W. BURGESS – M. KULIKOWSKI, *Mosaics of Time. The Latin Chronicle Traditions from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD. Vol. I. A Historical Introduction to the Chronicle Genre from its Origins to the High Middle Ages (Studies in the Early Middle Ages)*. Turnhout 2013, 30–31, 227; BURGESS, *The Origin and Evolution of Early Christian and Byzantine Universal Historiography. Millennium* 18 (2021) 53–154, 64 and n. 25. See also S. MARIEV, *Byzantinische Chronistik*, in: *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters*, ed. G. WOLF – N.H. OTT. Berlin 2016, 837–864, 853.

¹⁵ J. W. TORGERSON, *The Chronographia of George the Synkellos and Theophanes. The Ends of Time in Ninth-Century Constantinople*. Leiden – Boston 2022, 79. Even though Torgerson is not interested in the biographical question *per se*, it is not clear why he would ask what the references to Syria-Palestina would have indicated to a contemporary reader in terms of authorial identity if he had not thought that these references exist for some reason and are important for the study of the work.

¹⁶ MANGO, *Who Wrote?* 1978. The hypothesis has been followed by TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 38–77; against it, among others, see I. ČIČUROV, *Feofan Ispovednik: publikator, redactor, avtor? IV* 42 (1981) 78–86; J. N.

concluding that Synkellos had used only three written sources (Panodorus, Annianus and the Bible) because anything else seemed inconceivable for 9th-century Constantinople. He was also convinced that Gelzer was right in suggesting that Synkellos had spent time in Palestina before his appointment as synkellos. Shortly after Gelzer, Krumbacher stated that Synkellos must have spent a long time in Palestina because of his position as synkellos¹⁷. Krumbacher's and Gelzer's opinions in turn influenced the article by Laqueur, which is perhaps the foundation for independent study of Synkellos. For Laqueur, however, the possibility that Synkellos had visited the Holy Land was part of his rehabilitation, as it could disprove his reputation as a parlour scholar and a mere copyist of his sources¹⁸. And so we come to Mango.

Let us now revisit Mango's arguments one by one. Firstly, Theophanes himself claims in his preface to have received from Synkellos ἀφορομαί [aphormai] to complete the work, which Mango interprets as the "materials". Secondly, George could have been alive for a few more years after 810, when we know he was still writing; the chronicle must have been completed before December 814, because it presents a favourable picture of Leo V; Theophanes' hagiography tells us that he was affected by a serious illness from 810 onwards; Theophanes was not a man of much culture. However, all this would not be enough to presume Synkellos' authorship were it not for the fact that "*he resided for a considerable time in Palestina*" (italics are mine), for he claims to have seen Rachel's tomb with his own eyes. Mango cites other "Palestinian reminiscences" in support of his theory: the duration of Israel's journey through the desert in Moses' time, the harvest in Jericho before Passover, and the manna from Parthia¹⁹. All these passages have already been identified by Gelzer²⁰. According to Mango, this suggested that Synkellos was a monk there (most probably in St Chariton), that he may have been a Palestinian or a Syrian, and that he knew some Arabic and/or Syriac. All of this led Mango to conclude that "Synkellos would have shown particular interest in the events of Syria-Palestina." As Theophanes' chronicle includes a good deal of information about the East, to the extent that a lost Oriental chronicle written in Greek had been postulated as a source of this information by Brooks, Synkellos was an ideal candidate for having brought it from there to Constantinople. He could even have translated it into Greek. Finally, Mango added further details to reinforce his hypothesis: in describing the crisis that followed the death of Harun al-Raschid a "slaughter against *us*" (italics are mine) is mentioned, and this passage and a later one mention St Chariton's monastery before St Sabas²¹; George would have had more reasons to hate Emperor Nikephoros than Theophanes, because of his appointment by Irene and his likely involvement in Arsaber's conspiracy. In a concluding remark, Mango tells us that this issue is important for the

LJUBARSKIJ, Feofan Ispovednik i istochniki yego "Khronografii" (k voprosy o metodakh ikh osvoeniya). *IV* 45 (1984) 72–85; A. KAZHDAN, A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850). Athens 1999, 215–24; I. ROCHOW, Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes. Quellenkritisch-historischer Kommentar zu den Jahren 715–813 (*BBA* 57). Berlin 1991, 40; P. YANNOPOULOS, Théophane de Sigriani le Confesseur (759–818): Un héros orthodoxe du second iconoclasme. Brussels 2013, 269–73, whose work aims to rescue Theophanes from the accusation of ignorance. See also the comments of ŠEVČENKO, Search for the Past 287–88. C. ZUCKERMAN, Theophanes the Confessor and Theophanes the Chronicler, or, A Story of Square Brackets, in: Studies in Theophanes, ed. Jankowiak – Montinaro, Studies 31–52, has proposed to distinguish between the orthodox confessor and the chronicler, developing a suggestion of P. Speck, Der "zweite" Theophanes: eine These zur Chronographie des Theophanes (*Poikila Byzantina* 13). Bonn 1994. In contrast, see the recent publication by P. YANNOPOULOS, Un fantôme historique: « l'autre Theophane ». *BZ* 113 (2020) 189–218. There are many medieval historians whose secular works are not included in their biographies.

¹⁷ K. KRUMBACHER, Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur. Munich 1897 (2nd ed.), 340.

¹⁸ In any case, he makes this suggestion with the utmost caution. R. LAQUEUR, Synkellos, *RE* IV 2 (1932) cols. 1388–1410, here 1389, 16–42.

¹⁹ MANGO, Who wrote? 12–13 and n. 16.

²⁰ GELZER, Sextus Julius 179–80 (Rachel's tomb), 181 (desert journey), 182 (Jericho harvest), 181–82 (manna). In the latter case, Gelzer states that the tone of the passage speaks against Africanus' authorship, and points towards Panodorus.

²¹ Theophanes AM 6301 (DE BOOR 484, 14–19); Theophanes AM 6305 (DE BOOR 499, 15–25). MANGO, Who wrote? 14. The latter is also mentioned by GELZER, Sextus Julius 181.

history of Byzantine civilization because it gives some insight into the intellectual climate and bibliographical resources of Constantinople at the beginning of the 9th century. This is the precise origin of the whole hypothesis and also the cause of its greatest impact.

As far as Synkellos' biography is concerned, Mango's hypothesis has been taken to its limits. Huxley thought that Synkellos lived in Palestina and may have been a monk at St Chariton, and Treadgold took all the above references to Palestina as autobiographical experiences (Rachel's tomb and Jericho's harvest, adding the stones placed by Joshua in the Jordan), becoming convinced that George was synkellos of the patriarch of Jerusalem²². The *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* begins his biography by stating that George "stammt entweder aus Syrien/Palästina oder hat sich vor 787 dort möglicherweise längere Zeit aufgehalten"²³.

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS AGAINST MANGO'S HYPOTHESIS

With the remarkable exceptions of the contributions of Mango and Treadgold, all the studies on Synkellos have agreed on one point: that hardly anything is known about his biography beyond his name and the fact that he held the position of synkellos. As can be seen, the hypothesis that Synkellos resided in Palestina for a long time allowed Mango to connect him with Brooks' hypothesis about Theophanes's Eastern source, and make Synkellos the transmitter or even possible translator of this source. In fact, the ἀφορμαί may not have been exactly "materials", but rather guidelines, starting points or motifs²⁴. George could not have been alive for more than a couple of years after 810. The chronicle could have been completed after 814²⁵, and Theophanes, although truly ill, may have had assistants to finish it. But what if Synkellos never lived in Palestina? Not even Gelzer claims that he certainly did, but he wonders about it: "Ist am Ende Synkellos selbst ein Palästinenser? Die Orientalen machten damals wegen ihrer Bilderfreundlichkeit in Konstantinopel schnell Carrière."²⁶ Mango's hypothesis about Georges' Palestinian connection is not a problem; the problem is to base a hypothesis on another hypothesis and so on.

In an article forgotten by many later scholars, Grecu had wondered whether Synkellos took his passages about Mount Ararat, Rachel's tomb, Israel's journey through the desert, the manna, the Passover at Jericho, the remains of the flood in the mountains, and the tree where Jacob buried the idols from Africanus and Eusebius. Grecu queries this on account of the subject matter and character of Synkellos' work as a compilation, as well as the proven connections of both authorities of Christian chronography with the region of Syria-Palestina²⁷. However, Grecu held the fathers of the Christian chronicle in far greater esteem than Synkellos, who was only a mere monk who lived in Constantinople²⁸. In this way, his hypotheses may have been dismissed as biased, because he openly states that the proper thing for a monk was to spend his life locked up in his monastery. However

²² G. L. HUXLEY, On the Erudition of George the Synkellos. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 81 (1981) 207–217, 215–216; W. TREADGOLD, The Life and Wider Significance.

²³ PmbZ # 2180, in: R.-J. LILIE [et al.], *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*. Erste Abteilung (641–867), Zweite Abteilung (867–1025). Berlin 1999–2013.

²⁴ See P. VARONA, Chronographical Polemics in Ninth-Century Constantinople. George Synkellos, Iconoclasm and the Greek Chronicle Tradition. *Eranos* 108 (2017) 117–36, 125 and n. 39.

²⁵ For this, see recently TORGERSON, *Chronographia* 317–61.

²⁶ GELZER, *Sextus Julius* 182.

²⁷ V. GRECU, Hat Georgios Synkellos weitere Reise unternommen? *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie Roumaine* 28 (1947) 241–45. It is, however, quoted by Adler and Tuffin, The Chronography of George Synkellos lxxxi; A. KARPOZILOS, The Palestinian Connection of Georgios Synkellos, in: *Prosopon Rhomaikon: Ergänzende Studien zur Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, ed. A. Beihammer – B. Krönung – C. Ludwig, Berlin – Boston 2017, 85–92, 85, n. 5; and L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*. Cambridge 2018, 57, n. 9.

²⁸ For Grecu it was not important at all that George was a high-rank ecclesiastic who held an office very close to the patriarch.

wrong Grecu was in this respect, it makes sense to examine his objections with the help of Mosshammer's, Adler's and Tuffin's invaluable contributions to the edition and translation of the text.

From the relevant passages from Synkellos, Grecu mentions only one with a non-Palestinian theme, but which could also be interpreted as reminiscent. Concerning the exploits of Dionysos, Synkellos writes that "if interested, one can see his burial-place in Delphi near the golden statue of Apollo..."²⁹ Karpozilos critically analysed "the so-called autobiographical references" in Synkellos' work and claimed that "there are other numerous instances in which he describes monuments, ruins of cities and names as if they were still surviving in his time, although it is clear that he was simply reproducing his sources"³⁰. He also observed that some of these passages can be found in later works such as that attributed to Pseudo-Symeon, and that these later works often do not include the personal remarks attributed to Synkellos. In my opinion, these works do not include the personal remarks because they adapt the information provided to a different historical genre. Synkellos wrote an annotated chronography, a genre which is based on compiling excerpts from earlier chronographers to discuss them as a first step before proposing one's own chronological theses. It would be difficult and meaningless to eliminate the personal remarks from those excerpts, and, on the contrary, it makes perfect sense to transcribe them literally in most cases. However, this does not imply that they are verbatim pieces of the "original" works, because their source can be (and very often really was) an earlier chronography or other kind of compilation.

Let us review Mango's arguments for Synkellos' residence in Palestina (or Palestinian provenance): Rachel's tomb, distances in the desert, the harvest in Jericho, and the manna from Parthia. These are exactly the same pieces of evidence presented by Gelzer and probably the most important of these deals with Rachel's tomb³¹.

RACHEL'S TOMB

Ῥαχὴλ ἐν τῷ τίκτειν τὸν Βενιαμὶν ἐτελεύτησε, καὶ ἐτάφη μεταξὺ Βηθλεὲμ καὶ Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς τὸν ἵππόδρομον. ἦν δὲ τοῦ Λεὼι ἔτος κα', τοῦ δὲ κόσμου ἦν ἔτος γ'φοε'. ταύτης ἐγὼ τὴν λάρνακα τῆς γῆς ὑπερκειμένην πολλάκις ἐκεῖσε παροδεύων ἐπὶ Βηθλεὲμ καὶ τὴν παλαιὰν λεγομένην λαύραν τοῦ ὁσίου Χαρίτωνος ἑώρακα.³²

"Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin, and she was buried between Bethlehem and Jerusalem in the hippodrome. This was the 21st year of Levi, AM 3575. In my journeys to Bethlehem and what is known as the Old Lavra of blessed Chariton, I personally have passed by there frequently and seen her coffin lying on the ground."

This passage probably led Gelzer to conclude that Synkellos lived in Palestina because it is difficult to refute or dismiss as much³³. Treadgold, who relies on Mango, concludes that Synkellos was a representative of his monastery to the patriarchate of Jerusalem, for otherwise he finds it difficult to explain that he frequented this route³⁴. The whole passage belongs to an excerpt from

²⁹ Synkellos 190, 18–19 (MOSSHAMMER): τῷ δὲ βουλομένῳ πάρεστιν ἰδεῖν αὐτοῦ τὴν ταφὴν ἐν Δελφοῖς παρὰ τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα τὸν χρυσοῦν. Translations of Synkellos are taken from *The Chronography of George Synkellos* (transl. ADLER – TUFFIN).

³⁰ KARPOZILOS, *Palestinian Connection* 86.

³¹ Gelzer also mentions the reference to Χαρρὰν τῇ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κατειδώλῳ as a possible remark of Synkellos (or Pandidoros), Synkellos 107, 29–31 (MOSSHAMMER): ἐν Χαρρὰν δὲ ἐλθόντας τῇ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν κατειδώλῳ κατοικῆσαι ἐκεῖ δι' αἰσχροκερδίαν καὶ εἰδωλομανίαν, "but when they arrived in Charran, which is idolatrous even to this day, they settled there because of greed and a depraved obsession with idols."

³² Synkellos 122, 18–22 (MOSSHAMMER); GELZER, *Sextus Julius* 182.

³³ KARPOZILOS, *Palestinian Connection* 90.

³⁴ TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 40.

Africanus³⁵. The tomb is mentioned in the Septuagint, where it is stated that the pillar (stēlē) built upon it by Jacob is still there “to this day”³⁶. The oldest evidence of the location of the tomb (mnēma) near Bethlehem dates back to the 4th century³⁷, but there is barely any mention of it between the 5th and 7th centuries. The first detailed description of the monument comes from a Gallic peregrine which makes it clear that in 670 it was surrounded by a pyramid, in the Hellenistic-Roman style, and there is no evidence that it changed until the 12th century. The only description of the tomb that bears any resemblance to that of Synkellos (larnax) was made by an Italian peregrine from 570, who writes that *ad tertium miliarium de Hierosolima iacet Rachel corpore*³⁸. The mention of the Old Lavra of St Chariton, which was known by that name at least from the 6th century³⁹, may provide an approximate *terminus post quem*, but the mention of a well-known monastery and a well-known pilgrimage route should not entice us to draw many more conclusions. Chariton's tomb was also a pilgrimage site, as a memorial of the founder of Judean monasticism⁴⁰. The interpretation of the passage is more difficult than it might appear, and it is not entirely clear that it comes from an eyewitness.

DISTANCES IN THE DESERT

καίτοι τῆς ὅλης ὁδοῦ ἀπὸ Κάδης Βαρνὴ ἕως φάραγγος Ζαρὲθ μὴ οὔσης ἐ' ἡμερῶν, ὥς ἡμεῖς ἐπειράθημεν, ἥτις αὐτοῖς καταρεμβευσμένοις ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν λ' καὶ ἡ' χρόνοις διήνυσται.⁴¹

“But although the whole trip from Kades Barne up to the valley of Zareth is not even five days, as we know from our own experience, it took them thirty-eight years to accomplish the journey, since God was making them roam hither and thither.”

Synkellos highlights divine providence by showing that Israel's journey through the desert would have taken no more than five days if God had not decreed that it should take Moses' people thirty-eight years. He is commenting on a biblical verse in the context of a detailed reading of Deuteronomy⁴². The knowledge of the route may have originated in pilgrimage, because it is difficult to find another reason to travel between the valley of the Zered and Kadesh-Barnea other than cover-

³⁵ Synkellos 122, 1–123, 21 (MOSSHAMMER).

³⁶ Gn 35:20.

³⁷ Eusebios, Onomastikon 82, 10–13 (ed. E. KLOSTERMANN, Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen. Eusebios Werke 3.1 [GCS 2.1], Leipzig 1904). Adler and Tuffin observe that Synkellos' passage reflects the Septuagint's (wrong) rendering of Jacob's words (Gn 48:7), because the Hebrew Bible does not mention any hippodrome (The Chronography of George Synkellos 152, n. 7).

³⁸ For the sources, see F. STRICKERT, Rachel Weeping. Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the Fortress Tomb. Collegeville, MN 2007, 71–84. He thinks that Synkellos' description might be explained because the earthquake of 746 affected the tomb, but that does not explain why later sources mention the pyramid.

³⁹ D. NEARY, Constantinople and the Desert City: Imperial Patronage of the Judaean Desert Monasteries, 451–565, in: From Constantinople to the Frontier. The City and the Cities, ed. N. S. M. Matheou – Th. Kampiakai – L. M. Bondioli. Leiden 2016, 142–58, 145.

⁴⁰ He is credited with it in his biography, summarized in the Metaphrastic Menologion, Vitae Sanctorum, Mensis September: Vita et conversatio et certamen Sancti Patris nostri et confessoris Charitonis (PG 115, 899–918).

⁴¹ Synkellos 165, 16–19 (MOSSHAMMER).

⁴² Synkellos 165, 9–166, 20 (MOSSHAMMER); Dt 2:14: καὶ αἱ ἡμέραι, αἷς παρεπορεύθημεν ἀπὸ Κάδης Βαρνὴ ἕως οὗ παρήλθομεν τὴν φάραγγα Ζαρετ, τριάκοντα καὶ ὀκτὼ ἔτη, ἕως οὗ διέπεσεν πᾶσα γενεὰ ἀνδρῶν πολεμιστῶν ἀποθνήσκοντες ἐκ τῆς παρεμβολῆς, καθότι ὤμοσεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεός, “and the days which we had gone alongside from Kades Barne until we passed along the ravine of Zared were thirty-eight years until the entire generation of the men, warriors of the camp, has fallen away, as the Lord has sworn to them.” Translations of the Septuagint are taken from A New English Translation of the Septuagint. Oxford 2009.

ing the exodus route or visiting Miriam's (or Aaron's) tomb⁴³. It is important to highlight that this passage and the two following ones about the harvest in Jericho and the manna are concentrated in a single excerpt from Synkellos' work which covers the history between the exodus and the death of Joshua according to the Septuagint⁴⁴.

HARVEST IN JERICHO

ὅπερ μέχρι νῦν ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ἐν Ἰεριχῶ κατὰ τὴν ἐαρινὴν ἰσημερίαν γενόμενον θερισμὸν σίτου νέου κατὰ τοὺς θερμότερους τόπους συμφθάζοντα. ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἡ κατὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα ἀγιωτάτη ἐκκλησία συνήθως προφέρει τὴν ἀναίμακτον θυσίαν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς ζωηφόρου ἀναστάσεως Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.⁴⁵

"Hence, even to this day one can see in Jericho at the vernal equinox new grain being harvested early in the warmer locations. From this grain, the most holy church in Jerusalem customarily offers the bloodless offering during the anniversary of the life-bringing Resurrection of Christ our God."

A comment on the biblical account of the first Passover in the Promised Land states that new grain is harvested early in Jericho until today and that the church of Jerusalem makes use of it on Easter Sunday⁴⁶. If this comment is Synkellos' own, it could be interpreted as knowledge gained from a pilgrimage on the well-attested Jericho-Jerusalem route following Jesus' steps. However, this passage and the previous two are related to important pilgrimage sites and routes that had been well known since ancient times. In this way, Synkellos could have taken this information from an earlier source of any genre⁴⁷. The preservation of this custom also seems strange for the late 8th–early 9th century.

THE MANNA FROM PARTHIA

τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τὸ μάννα κομισθὲν ἐκ τῆς Παρθικῆς εἶδον ἐγὼ καὶ μετέσχον αὐτοῦ.⁴⁸

"Now when manna was brought back from Parthia, I myself saw it and partook it."

The biblical manna has been identified with a nutritive lichen (*Lecanora esculenta*) whose use as food and medicine is likely very old but is only referred to starting in the ninth century by Arab authors⁴⁹. The Andalusian Muhammad al-Ghafiqi (c. 1160) states that it was usually exported from Barca (Cyrenaica) and Khorasan (ancient Parthia), with the latter being of the best quality⁵⁰. However, this lichen was exported all over the world (as far as the other side of the Mediterranean) from

⁴³ On Kadesh-Barnea, Eusebius writes that it is the desert extending to Petra in Arabia and that Miriam was buried there, which can be seen until today (Eusebius, *Onomastikon* 112, 8–12 [KLOSTERMANN]).

⁴⁴ Synkellos 147, 1–171, 11 (MOSSHAMMER).

⁴⁵ Synkellos 168, 12–16 (MOSSHAMMER).

⁴⁶ Josh 5:8–11

⁴⁷ See, for example, P. MARAVAL, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient. Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*. Paris 1985, 272 (Rachel's tomb), 277–80 (route Jericho-Jerusalem, at least from the 4th century).

⁴⁸ Synkellos 150, 17–18 (MOSSHAMMER).

⁴⁹ Initially, Gelzer expressed the opinion that it was attributable to Africanus (Sextus Julius Africanus und die byzantinische Chronographie I. Leipzig 1880, 10), but after that he changed his mind and attributed it to Synkellos (Sextus Julius 181–82).

⁵⁰ R. A. DONKIN, *Manna, an Historical Geography (Biogeographica 17)*. Dordrecht 1980, 44–45. According to KARPOZILOS, *Palestinian Connection* 87, the mention of Parthia made no sense in Synkellos' time.

the east of ancient Persia, so Synkellos could have tasted it elsewhere, not necessarily in Palestina, and he certainly could have done so in Constantinople.

OTHER PASSAGES ADDED TO THE DEBATE⁵¹

1. Mount Ararat⁵². The comment belongs to an excerpt from Africanus which Africanus' latest editors recognize as his⁵³. After concluding Africanus' excerpt about the flood, Synkellos moves on with his own chronology and he states that Mount Ararat is in Armenia, without any doubt (or mention of personal experience whatsoever)⁵⁴.
2. Remains of the flood in the mountains⁵⁵. The passage belongs to an excerpt from Eusebius which can also be found verbatim in the *Eklogē historiōn* of the Parisinus Gr. 854 and in the Armenian version of Eusebius' chronography⁵⁶. A slightly different version is preserved by George the Monk, who rightly quotes Josephus⁵⁷. Malalas mentions Josephus, Eusebius and an unknown Pergamos as sources for this. According to Pergamos, "its timbers (of the ark) are there to the present day" (ἔστιν τὰ ξύλα αὐτῆς ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς νῦν)⁵⁸. Judging from Josephus' version, Berossos may have been the source of the fish motif⁵⁹.
3. Tree where Jacob buried the idols (Gn 35:2)⁶⁰. The passage belongs to an excerpt from Africanus which Africanus' latest editors recognize as his⁶¹.
4. Dead Sea⁶². The passage belongs to an excerpt from Africanus which Africanus' latest editors recognize as his⁶³.

⁵¹ Passages 1–4 are mentioned by GRECU, Hat Georgios Synkellos?

⁵² Synkellos 22, 6–8 (MOSSHAMMER): ὡς δὲ ἔληξε τὸ ὕδωρ, ἡ κιβωτὸς ἰδρύθη ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη Ἀραράτ, ἅτινα ἴσμεν ἐν Παρθίᾳ, τινὲς δὲ ἐν Κελαιναιῖς τῆς Φρυγίας εἶναι φασιν· εἶδον δὲ τὸν τόπον ἐκάτερον, "but when the water receded, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, which we know to be in Parthia, but some say is in Kelainai of Phrygia."

⁵³ Julius Africanus, F23 (ed. M. WALLRAFF, Iulius Africanus Chronographiae [*GCS N.F.* 15]. Berlin – New York 2007, 50, 18–20).

⁵⁴ Synkellos 23, 11–12 (MOSSHAMMER): ἐκάθισεν ἡ κιβωτὸς ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη τὰ Ἀραράτ, τοῦτ' ἔστι τῆς Ἀρμενίας, "the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, that is, of Armenia."

⁵⁵ Synkellos 96, 4–12 (MOSSHAMMER): τοῦ δὲ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν ἀρθῆναι ὑπὲρ τὰ ὑψηλότατα τῶν ὀρέων καὶ ἡμῖν τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα γράφουσιν ἀλήθειαν ἐπιστώσατο αὐτοψία τισὶν ἰχθύων καθ' ἡμᾶς εὐρημένων ἄνω πρὸς αὐταῖς τοῦ Λιβάνου ταῖς ὑψηλοτάταις ἀκρωρείαις. λίθους γὰρ ἐνθένδε εἰς οἰκοδομὰς τινες ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρῶν ἐκτέμνοντες θαλαττίων ἰχθύων εὗρον διάφορα γένη, ἃ δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν κατὰ τὰ ὄρη κοιλωμάτων συναποπαγῆναι τῇ ἰλύι καὶ τεταριγευμένων δίκην εἰς δεῦρο διαμείναι συνέβη, ὥσθ' ἡμῖν καὶ δι' αὐτῆς τῆς ὁψεως τὴν τοῦ παλαιοῦ λόγου πιστωθῆναι μαρτυρίαν, "and as to the Flood-waters' cresting above the highest of the mountains, we who are writing after the fact also have confirmation for its veracity from some people in our time who have personally examined fish discovered high up on the tallest peaks of Mount Libanus. For as some were cutting away stones there out of the mountains for their homes, they discovered various species of sea fish, which, it turned out, were congealed in mud cavities in the mountains and remained up to this day in a kind of embalmed state. Therefore, the witness of the ancient tradition is confirmed by us, and with our own eyes at that."

⁵⁶ *Eklogē historiōn* (CRAMER 170, 6–15); Eusebius, *Chronographia* 41, 19–29 (KARST).

⁵⁷ George the Monk I 48, 25–49, 1–7 (ed. C. DE BOOR, Georgii Monachi Chronicon [*BSGRT*]. Leipzig 1904). KARPOZIOLOS, Palestinian Connection 89, adds the version preserved by Eustathius of Antioch (*PG* 18, 761). The motif of the remnants of the flood in the mountains is a topic of flood narratives. See C. WESTERMANN, Genesis 1–11. A Commentary. Minneapolis 1984, 443.

⁵⁸ Malalas I 4 (ed. H. THURN, Ioannis Malalae Chronographia [*CFHB* 35] Berlin – New York 2000, 7, 86–92). Translations of Malalas are taken from *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (trans. E. JEFFREYS – M. JEFFREYS – R. SCOTT. Melbourne 1986).

⁵⁹ Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* I 93, 1–6 (ed. B. NIESE, Flavii Iosephi opera I. Berlin 1887).

⁶⁰ Synkellos 123, 13–16 (MOSSHAMMER): Ἰακώβ ἀπαρεσθῆεις τοῖς ὑπὸ Συμεὼν καὶ Λεὼι πραχθεῖσιν ἐν Σικίμοις διὰ τὴν τῆς ἀδελφῆς φθορὰν εἰς τοὺς ἐπιχωρίους, θάψας ἐν Σικίμοις οὓς ἐφέρετο θεοὺς παρὰ τὴν πέτρην ὑπὸ τὴν θαυμασίαν τερέβινθον, ἥτις μέχρι νῦν εἰς τιμὴν τῶν πατριαρχῶν ὑπὸ τῶν πλησιοχώρων τιμᾶται, "Jacob was displeased by what Symeon and Levi had done in Shechem against the inhabitants there in retaliation for their sister's defilement. And he buried in Shechem the gods that he brought with him by the rock underneath the wonderful terebinth tree, which is even to this day venerated by the neighbouring peoples in honour of the patriarchs."

⁶¹ Julius Africanus, F30 (66 WALLRAFF, which also includes the parallel text of Eustathius' commentary on the hexaemeron).

5. Gilgal's twelve stones memorial set up by Joshua to commemorate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan river, added by Treadgold⁶⁴. On this occasion, Synkellos does no more than reproduce the information from the Septuagint⁶⁵.
6. Manuscript borrowed from the library at Caesarea⁶⁶. Torgerson adds this piece of evidence as a "self-referential statement", but Synkellos clearly says that the manuscript "came to him from the library of Caesarea", so he was not there⁶⁷.
7. Treadgold interprets the reference to "our people" (τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν) in his description of the threat represented by the "covenant" against Christ made by Islam at the beginning of the chronography as evidence of Synkellos' Syrian origin⁶⁸. He interprets this general description of this threat as a reference to the information about the attacks on Palestinian Christian establishments at the end of Theophanes. However, both "among themselves and *against us*" (κατ' ἀλλήλων καὶ ἡμῶν, Theophanes) and "*our people*" (τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν, Synkellos) could be interpreted as a simple reference to Christians, and not necessarily the Christian population in Palestina⁶⁹.

THE PALESTINIAN CONNECTION AND THE GREEK CHRONICLE GENRE

As seen above, Synkellos' supposed first-hand knowledge of the Syriac chronicle tradition was interpreted by Mango to be the missing link between the Eusebian chronicle tradition and Theophanes' chronicle throughout the so-called "Dark Ages". This period represents a gap that has been often identified with the lack of secular literature, in particular historiography, and whose end has been considered as marked by a renewed interest in the past⁷⁰. Mango's assumption has not yet been seriously questioned and no alternative has been proposed. However, is this missing link nec-

⁶² Synkellos 114, 12–13 (MOSSHAMMER): συνέβαλλον δὲ παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ἀλικήν, ἣ καλεῖται νῦν θάλαττα νεκρά· ἐν ταύτῃ πλεῖστα τῶν θαυμασίων τεθέσθαι, "they met by the Salt Sea, which is now called the Dead Sea. In this sea, I have witnessed a great many marvellous things."

⁶³ Julius Africanus, F26 (58–60 WALLRAFF).

⁶⁴ Synkellos 167, 18–19 (MOSSHAMMER): Ἔστησέ τε ἄλλους ἰβ' λίθους Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ, οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες τῶν αἰρόντων τὴν κιβωτὸν ἱερῶν, καὶ εἰσὶν ἐκεῖ ἕως σήμερον, "Joshua set another twelve stones in the Jordan, where the feet of the priests carrying the ark had stood, and they are there until this day"; TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 41; TREADGOLD, *Life and Wider Significance* 11.

⁶⁵ Josh 4:9: ἔστησεν δὲ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἄλλους δώδεκα λίθους ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ἐν τῷ γενομένῳ τόπῳ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἱερῶν τῶν αἰρόντων τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου, καὶ εἰσὶν ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας, "now Iesus also set up another twelve stones in the Jordan itself, in the place that was under the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and they are there until this very day."

⁶⁶ Synkellos 240, 12–15 (MOSSHAMMER): Ἐν ἐνὶ δὲ ἀντιγράφῳ λίαν ἡκριβωμένῳ κατὰ τε στιγμὴν καὶ προσφδίαν ἐκ τῆς ἐν Καισαρείᾳ τῆς Καππαδοκίας ἐλθόντι εἰς ἐμὲ βιβλιοθήκης, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐπεγέγραπτο ὡς ὁ μέγας καὶ θεὸς Βασίλειος τὰ ἐξ ὧν ἐκεῖνο ἀπεγράφη ἀντιβαλὼν διωρθώσατο βιβλία, "this manuscript, very precisely marked for both punctuation and pronunciation, came to me from the library of Caesarea in Cappadocia. It bears an inscription that the great and divine Basil collated and corrected the biblical exemplar from which that copy was made."

⁶⁷ TORGERSO, *Chronographia* 83, n. 16.

⁶⁸ Synkellos 6, 7–9 (MOSSHAMMER): τὴν κατὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν θεοβδέλυκτον διαθήκην, ἣν διέθετο τὰ σκηνώματα τῶν Ἰδουμαίων καὶ οἱ Ἰσμαηλῖται διώκοντες τὸν κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα λαόν, "the covenant, abominable to God, that has been made against Christ and our nation both by 'the tents of the Idumaeans and by the Ishmaelites'"; TREADGOLD, *Middle Byzantine Historians* 40; TREADGOLD, *Life and Wider Significance* 11.

⁶⁹ As Treadgold does following MANGO, *Who wrote?* 14. See above n. 22.

⁷⁰ ŠEVČENKO, *Search for the Past*. For a critic of the identification of the so-called "Dark Ages" with the lack of secular literature, see J. F. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*. Cambridge 1990, 425–26; A. M. CAMERON, *New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: Seventh-Eighth Centuries*, in: *The Byzantine and Islamic Near East I. Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. CAMERON – L. I. CONRAD (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 1). Princeton, NJ 1992, 81–105; R.-J. LILIE, *Wie dunkel sind die "Dunklen Jahrhunderte"?* Zur Quellsituation in der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit und ihren Auswirkungen auf die Forschung. *JÖB* 43 (1993) 37–44.

essary to explain the development of the Greek chronicle in the Middle Ages? There are four aspects that we can tackle in this question.

The first of these four aspects is theoretical. Sources and models are not the same, but they are often confused when historians get involved in literary criticism. Thus, in this article the aim is not to question the existence of an "Eastern source" for Theophanes, much less to demarcate its characteristics in any way. Rather, I would like to suggest that this has nothing to do with Theophanes' models as a chronicler, which must be investigated independently on different bases. Despite Mango's assertion that "granted that the Chronicle [of Theophanes] is a file, its study is in a very real sense the study of its sources", today it is widely recognized that compilatory works should be the object of specific studies different from the study of their sources⁷¹.

The second aspect to discuss here is cultural and historical in perspective. All that we know of Syriac chronicles suggests that they were strongly influenced by the Greek tradition and there is not the slightest bit of evidence to the contrary⁷². Recent studies from different approaches and with different aims unanimously rule that the transmission from Greek to Syriac and from there back to Greek until reaching Theophanes is unlikely⁷³. These studies also show that almost nothing can be argued with certainty about the "Eastern source", neither in terms of language, nor of content or structure⁷⁴, or that it should be better conceived as a multiplicity of sources⁷⁵. However, the Syriac chronicles have traditionally been considered to be of great significance for the study of early Christian chronicles because the strong influence that Eusebius had on them allowed for the possibility of tracing the lost Greek original by means of Quellenforschung. Indeed, for more than a century the Armenian translation of Eusebius' chronicle was considered to be derived to some extent from the Syriac versions⁷⁶. Gelzer was a pioneer in the study of the *testimonia Eusebiana* and we have seen that his work influenced Mango's⁷⁷. There is also a cultural prejudice that may have influenced the identification between Syriac sources and Syriac literary models, that is, the assumption that medieval readers used to read, analyse, and process a text in the same way as we do.

The third aspect to our question is methodological. Was there ever really a gap in Byzantine historiography? Can it be claimed that the 9th-century chroniclers had no trace of the Eusebian tradition to rely on? Byzantine historical culture is being increasingly recognized as more than a handful

⁷¹ A. MEEUS, *Compilation or tradition? Some Thoughts on the Methods of Historians and Other Scholars in Antiquity*. *Sacris Erudiri* 56 (2017) 395–413; P. ODORICO, *Cadre d'exposition / cadre de pensée: la culture du recueil*, in: *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?* ed. P. Van Deun – C. Macé (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 212). Leuven 2011, 89–108.

⁷² WITAKOWSKI, *The Chronicle of Eusebius*; M. DEBIÉ, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque: transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam : avec des répertoires des textes historiographiques en annexe*. Leuven 2015, 478–79.

⁷³ DEBIÉ, *Theophanes' "Oriental source"*; M. CONTERNO, *Theophilus, "the More Likely Candidate"?* Towards a Reappraisal of the Question of Theophanes' "Oriental Source(s)", in: *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 383–400; HILKENS, *Before the Eastern Source: Theophanes and the Late Syriac Orthodox Chronicles, 4th–6th Centuries*, in: *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 401–13.

⁷⁴ As stated by R. G. HOYLAND, *Agapius, Theophilus and Muslim Sources*, in: *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 355–364, and providing the basis for DEBIÉ, *Theophanes' "Oriental Source"*, and CONTERNO, *Theophilus, "the More Likely Candidate"?* By way of example, HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* 198, describes the work of Theophilus of Edessa as narrative in character and lacking chronological precision, following HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* 406–07, and he states shortly afterwards that Theophanes modelled his analytical organization of the material on it (*ibid.* 273, n. 12 and 279). See the review of Howard-Johnston's book by M. CONTERNO, *Processo ai testimoni: un'inchiesta storiografica sulle fonti per il VII secolo*, *JRA* 24 (2011) 897–912, 905. See also M. CONTERNO, *La "descrizione dei tempi" all' alba dell' espansione islamica. Un' indagine sulla storiografia greca, siriana e araba fra VII e VIII secolo*. Berlin – Boston 2014.

⁷⁵ DEBIÉ, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque* 387–402.

⁷⁶ Mainly since Karst's translation (1911), see above n. 1; see MOSSHAMMER, *The Chronicle of Eusebius* 74; see now Eusèbe de Césarée. *Chronique I* (47–49 A. COHEN-SKALLI).

⁷⁷ In 1884 Gelzer co-edited and translated into Latin the version of the *Canons* preserved in Vat. Syr. 162: *Eusebii Canonum epitome ex Dionysii Telmaharensis Chronica petita* (ed. K. SIEGFRIED – H. GELZER. Leipzig 1884).

of conspicuous names⁷⁸ and it is not clear why, in assessing the gap, “the starting point must be the comparative vitality of Greek historiography through the late 6th century”⁷⁹, that is, once more the classical tradition. Emphasis on transmission, essential for the study of historical writing in the Middle Ages, is beginning to be called for, and a better understanding of the methodological problems of the so-called “living texts” so very characteristic of the Middle Ages, is beginning to appear⁸⁰. There is certainly no proof that the original version of Eusebius’ chronicle was preserved at the time of Synkellos, but there is abundant indirect evidence of the reworking of Eusebius in Greek⁸¹. Both the sources of 9th-century Greek historiography and those of the Syriac one (also Greek) suggest the continuity of a tradition⁸². For Mango, however, the last representative of the Eusebian tradition in Greek had been Panodoros—reflecting the influence of Gelzer’s paradigm, whose work also did not reach 9th-century Constantinople. As for Annianus, his preservation in Syriac and not in Greek should not be considered as evidence of the continuity of the Eusebian tradition in Syriac, but as the result of criticism in the Greek tradition, because the Greeks had a far lower opinion of the use he had made of extra-biblical sources than the Syrians did⁸³. In sum, the same can be said about Theophanes as what Van Nuffelen has masterfully expressed about Malalas: “The hermeneutics of suspicion has failed to recognise that the chronographic tradition in Greek after Eusebius is by and large lost, as is local historiography. *By situating Malalas simply against the background of preserved traditions, we fail to understand not only his use of sources but also where he positions himself within the history of Greek chronography*” (italics are mine)⁸⁴. Perhaps we should ask not how Theophanes’ chronicle was possible, but rather why only two proper Greek chronicles (the Paschal Chronicle and Theophanes’) are preserved between the 4th and 9th centuries. It appears that other types of historiographical texts were far more copied, and that this is not simply a question of textual forms, but of textual culture in a wider sense.

The fourth and final aspect to the question is literary. What is so Eusebian in Theophanes’ chronicle that cannot be explained by its own literary context? The reception of Eusebius in Byzantium is a much more complex matter than it might seem, involving aspects of historical content, chronology, format, structure, etc. Despite this, Mango only focuses on the “chronological structure”, defining it as follows:

⁷⁸ S. PAPAIOANNOU, Byzantine historia, in: K.A. Raaflaub (ed.), *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World*. Oxford 2013, 297–313, 305: “The most common form of historiographical texts in Byzantine book culture were brief chronicle-type accounts or historiographical fragments and excerpts, a large number of which remain unpublished as such.” See also P. VARONA, *Chronology and History in Byzantium*. *GRBS* 58 (2018) 389–422.

⁷⁹ M. WHITBY, Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Vitality, in: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* I 25–80, 67.

⁸⁰ P. VARONA, Why Another Greek Chronicle? Form and Function in Middle Byzantine Historical Writing. *The Medieval Chronicle* 12 (2019) 164–91, 164–77. For a case study, see P. ODORICO, Dans le cahier des chroniqueurs. Le cas d’Eustathe d’Antioche, in: *Textual Transmission in Byzantium: Between Textual Criticism and Quellenforschung*, ed. J. Signes Codoñer – I. Pérez Martín (*Lectio* 2). Turnhout 2014, 373–89; for Theophanes, see JANKOWIAK, Framing Universal History; J. W. TORGERSON, From the Many, One? The Shared Manuscripts of the Chronicle of Theophanes and the Chronography of Synkellos, in: Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 93–117.

⁸¹ Most evidence can be found in compilatory texts that are not appreciated much by historians, such as the so-called “Vatican Chronicle” (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, gr. 2210 [*Diktyon* 68841]) or the *Eklogē historiōn* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 854 [*Diktyon* 50441]). See P. VARONA, Eusebius’ Four Tempora: a Brief Survey of Christian Chronological Traditions through their Reception in Byzantine *supputationes*. *JECS* 31/3 (2023) 357–87. For a recently discovered 9th/10th-century Greek palimpsest, see J. GRUSKOVÁ, Zur Textgeschichte der Chronik des Eusebios zwischen Okzident und Orient („Eusebii Chronici fragmentum Vindobonense” – ein neues griechisches Handschriftenfragment), in: *Byzanz und das Abenland I. Begegnungen zwischen Ost und West*, ed. Erika Juhász (*Bibliotheca Byzantina* 1). Budapest 2013, 43–51.

⁸² DEBIÉ, L’écriture de l’histoire en syriaque 373–74.

⁸³ ADLER, Time Immemorial 104; DEBIÉ, L’écriture de l’histoire en syriaque 344.

⁸⁴ P. VAN NUFFELEN, Malalas and the Chronographic Tradition, in: *Die Weltchronik Des Johannes Malalas. Quellenfragen*, eds. L. Carrara – M. Meier – Ch. Radtki-Jansen (*Malalas Studien* 2). Stuttgart 2017, 261–72, 267.

“Each annual entry is preceded by a rubric written horizontally across the page. It consists of the *annus mundi*, occasionally the *annus Domini*, the regnal year of the Roman emperor, of the king of Persia, and of the five patriarchs, those of Rome (...) The succession of the two great temporal rulers and of the five leaders of the Christian church establish the universal framework (...) The question now arises of the origin of this particular structure. Broadly speaking, it goes back to the *Chronicle of Eusebius*, which was arranged in vertical columns of rulers intersected by a horizontal grid of dates, namely, Olympiads and years from Abraham.” (italics are mine)⁸⁵

The more I read this description of Eusebius' *Chronici canones*, the more I doubt that it applies to Theophanes' chronicle. Significantly, Mango does not focus on the annalistic arrangement, which is the main characteristic of a chronicle, and he does not consider as important this resemblance with the Paschal chronicle, which he described as “a very strange work”⁸⁶. In his famous preface, Theophanes writes the following:

τόδε τὸ χρονογραφεῖον ἀπὸ Διοκλητιανοῦ μέχρι τῆς βασιλείας Μιχαὴλ καὶ Θεοφυλάκτου, τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, τὰς τε βασιλείας καὶ τοὺς πατριάρχας καὶ τὰς τούτων πράξεις σὺν τοῖς χρόνοις κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἡμῖν ἀκριβῶς συνεγραψάμεθα⁸⁷.

“I (...) have written down accurately (...) this chronicle from Diocletian down to the reign of Michael and his son Theophylaktos, namely the reigns [of the emperors] and the patriarchs and their deeds, together with their dates.” (italics are mine)

Recent research has shown the absence or discontinuity of the rubrics in the manuscript transmission of Theophanes' chronicle. Thus, its oldest witnesses—Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France gr. 1710 (*Diktyon* 51334) and the Latin translation by Anastasius Bibliothecarius—are completely lacking in rubrics. In the mid-9th-century Parisinus gr. 1710 most of the annual entries begin with an indication of the type “in this year” (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει), without reference to any chronological system except for the name of a newly proclaimed emperor when applicable, while Anastasius systematically refers to the regnal years⁸⁸. These two witnesses (to which Wake Greek 5 and Vat Gr. 155 have been added⁸⁹) only occasionally resort to the *annus mundi*. In the later transmission, the inclusion of the *annus mundi* in the Parisinus gr. 1710 and in Anastasius coincides with the presence of complete rubrics⁹⁰, which seems to suggest that these years were marked in a distinctive way in the archetype. In subsequent manuscripts, the complete rubrics, which include the *annus mundi*, are scarce in relation to the abbreviated rubrics relating to the regnal years, of which only a few examples include the *annus mundi* and the year of the incarnation. Thus, it seems

⁸⁵ MANGO, Tradition 369. See also: “The Eusebian vision of a universal history, both sacred and secular, flowing in parallel columns over a horizontal grid of years ...”, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (transl. C. MANGO – R. SCOTT, liii).

⁸⁶ MANGO, Tradition 362–63.

⁸⁷ Theophanes, preface (4, 9–13 DE BOOR; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, transl. C. MANGO – R. SCOTT 2).

⁸⁸ M. JANKOWIAK, Framing universal history, and recently TORGERSON, *Chronographia*. KAZHDAN, *History of Byzantine Literature* 224, noticed that similar indications are found in Malalas or in the Paschal Chronicle, but understood that Theophanes could have taken from these works the chronological principle of composition. However, these indications can be interpreted as vestiges of the chronicle sources used by *breviaria* like those of Malalas and a good part of the Paschal Chronicle, and in turn, *breviaria* used as sources by Theophanes. For the Malalas work as a historical *breviarium*, see the recently published R. W. BURGESS – M. KULIKOWSKI, *The Historiographical Position of John Malalas. Genre in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages*, in: *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas. Author – Werk – Überlieferung*, ed. M. Meier – C. Radtke – F. Schulz. Stuttgart 2016, 93–117. The Paschal Chronicle is a considerably complex work that unites computistic with elements characteristic of chronicles and *breviaries*.

⁸⁹ TORGERSON, *Chronographia*.

⁹⁰ That include the following dating elements: year of the creation, year of the incarnation (not always), year of the Roman emperor, year of the Persian king—who would be replaced by the caliph of Baghdad—Pope of Rome, Patriarch of Constantinople, Patriarch of Jerusalem, Patriarch of Alexandria and Patriarch of Antioch.

that Theophanes' chronicle made relatively little use of the *annus mundi* as a structural or chronological marker. In this sense, its modern edition and translation gives a slightly misleading impression⁹¹. There has even been doubt that the rubrics were part of the original edition of the chronicle⁹², and their gradual disappearance in the manuscript transmission has also been documented⁹³. Mango and Scott already observed that very often the dates of the rubrics did not coincide with the content of the *lemmata*⁹⁴. In the manuscript transmission, Theophanes differs from Synkellos in that he places the complete rubrics in tabular (i. e. horizontal) format, while Synkellos displays them in a list format, (although we do not know to what extent this is due to the authors' intentions or to the later copying, because we do not have the original manuscripts).

One wonders how it can be possible to deprive a text of its main structural feature without distorting it in a radical way, as occurred in the transmission of Theophanes' chronicle. This may be explained by the fact that it was not in any essential sense a Eusebian chronicle, brief and chronologically structured, but a narratively structured text which can be read and fully understood as such, as first evidenced by its copyists. Although influenced by Mango's approach to Theophanes, Burgess and Kulikowski do not fail to notice this important singularity of Theophanes' work which distances it from the prototype of the Eusebian chronicle, the narrative development of the *lemmata*⁹⁵. If we compare Theophanes' chronicle with Eusebius' chronicle, with the Latin chronicles that follow that of Jerome—Prosper, Hydatius, Marcellinus or Victor of Tunnuna, from the 5th–6th centuries—, with the chronicle of Isidore (c. 625), with the Mozarab chronicles (c. 741–54), with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—from the end of the 9th century in its oldest preserved version—and with the Asturian chronicles of the late 9th century, we find that it is radically different in its extension of the *lemmata*. To cite a striking example, the entry of AM 6026 (AD 533/34), the longest in Theophanes' entire work, narrating the Vandal Wars waged by Justinian, almost three hundred years before the time of the chronicler, covers a total of no less than twenty pages in the translation by Mango and Scott and twenty-eight in the edition by De Boor⁹⁶. This particularity of some chronicles has at times been awarded the label "developed chronicles"⁹⁷. The convergence between chronicle elements and narrative genres was already present in the Paschal Chronicle and there is nothing in it that cannot be explained in terms of the internal development of Greek historiography.

In sum, it is doubtful that the rubrics should be considered as the basic structural unit of Theophanes' chronicle. However, Mango states that "The ultimate source of *Theophanes' scheme* was the Chronicle of Eusebius" (*italics are mine*), in allusion to the rubrics that head up the annual en-

⁹¹ As JANKOWIAK, *Framing Universal History*, shows by close examination of the Parisinus gr. 1710, Oxford Christ Church, Wake 5, Vaticanus gr. 155 and Vaticanus gr. 154.

⁹² J. SIGNES, *Theophanes at the Time of Leo VI*, in: Jankowiak – Montinaro, *Studies* 159–76.

⁹³ JANKOWIAK, *Framing Universal History*.

⁹⁴ *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (transl. C. MANGO – R. SCOTT, lxii).

⁹⁵ R. W. BURGESS – M. KULIKOWSKI, *Mosaics of Time* 231–32.

⁹⁶ The importance of the narrative element in Theophanes has been highlighted by I. ČIČUROV, *Mesto "Khronographii" Feofana v rannevizantijskoj istoriograficheskoj traditsii (IV–načalo IX v.)*, in: *Drevnejšie Gosudarstva na territorii SSSR. Materialy i issledovaniya* 1981. Moscow 1983, 5–146; R. MAISANO, *Il "sistema" compositivo della Cronaca di Teofane*, in: *SYNDESMOS. Studi in onore Rosario Anastasi*. Catania 1994, 54–71; J. LJUBARSKII, *Concerning the Literary Technique of Theophanes the Confessor*. *BSI* 56 (1995) 317–22.

⁹⁷ A label that WITAKOWSKI, *The Chronicle of Eusebius* 429, applies to the Chronicle of the Pseudo-Dionysius (or Zuqnin Chronicle) and to that of Michael the Syrian. See also A. PALMER et al., *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles (Translated Texts for Historians* 15). Liverpool 1993, xxviii–xxix, who distinguishes between chronicles in which the "factual reporting (usually brief)" predominates and chronicles in which the "story telling (often long)" predominates, the latter style represented mainly by the historians of the Church. He attributes to the former an eminently controversial function and to the latter, a hortatory one. More than the examples cited above, Theophanes' chronicle resembles some parts of Pseudo-Fredegair's chronicle (c. 660), which is a universal history compiled from extracts of chronicle sources of different kinds. See, for example, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegair, with its Continuations* (ed. and trans. by J. M. WALLACE-HADRILL. London 1960, IV. 36, pp. 23–29 [a. 609]).

tries, which he understands unnecessarily as derived from a synchronic chronology in tabular format like that of the Eusebian *Chronici canones*⁹⁸. In fact, the basic structural unit of the chronicle is rather the reign—and the years of reign head up the abbreviated rubrics—, as this is inherent to the reorganization of the historical material carried out by Theophanes and derives from Syncellus' chronographic sources, made up of regnal (and episcopal) lists. This has been pointed out on occasion and is increasingly emphasized, but it has had little impact on the conception of Theophanes' work in modern scholarship and on the historiographical conception of the Greek chronicle tradition⁹⁹. In other words, if we agree that it is so, we should also agree that it has many implications. Moreover, the reign is also the structural principle that Theophanes mostly found in his sources¹⁰⁰. In fact, this reorganization is what allows Theophanes to recount his historical vision based on the polarity between orthodoxy and heresy, the theological outline of punishment and reward, and the rise and decline of the empire since the time of Constantine, all articulated around the successive emperors and organized under a particular selection and arrangement of the sources¹⁰¹.

The structure and format of Theophanes differs both from his predecessor Synkellos and from the Syriac chroniclers¹⁰². In any case, if we consider the rubrics to be original, Theophanes would have needed only the series regum to introduce them, because he did not question the chronological framework adopted by Synkellos and only had to solve problems of relative chronology, largely dictated by the nature of his (narrative) sources. For the series regum, he undoubtedly had all the chronographical material compiled by Synkellos. By only marking the years of accession in his lemmata, Synkellos himself reveals this prominence of the reign as a structural principle¹⁰³. However, Synkellos undertook genuine chronological research for essentially ideological and doctrinal reasons, which led him to formulate his own hypotheses on absolute chronology. Without elements for a synchronic dating, he would not have been able to challenge Eusebius' main chronological thesis, as was his goal¹⁰⁴. To understand this, it is necessary to properly relate the various chronicle subgenres and to analyse all aspects of Eusebian reception. In any case, it seems clear that Synkellos' role as predecessor and inspiration of Theophanes did not reduce to his supposed knowledge of the Syriac chronicles, and that this supposed knowledge does not contribute towards explaining the particular features of Synkellos' work or those of Theophanes¹⁰⁵. Instead of the result of external influence, it would be more logical to consider Synkellos and Theophanes' joint work as an archaism and a return to the past. Is it not much more typical of the Greek literary tradition?

⁹⁸ MANGO, Tradition 369, and The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor (transl. MANGO – SCOTT, lii).

⁹⁹ J. N. LJUBARSKIJ, Concerning the Literary Technique 317–22; JANKOWIAK, Framing Universal History. As R. SCOTT, The Classical Tradition in Byzantine Historiography, has already claimed, in: Byzantium and the Classical Tradition. University of Birmingham Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, ed. M. E. Mullett – R. Scott. Birmingham 1981, 61–74, 69.

¹⁰⁰ Not only in his continuators, as TORGERSON, Chronographia, points out.

¹⁰¹ For some of these aspects, see, for example, KAZHDAN, History of Byzantine Literature 220–21, 229; R. MAISANO, Il “sistema” compositivo 283–86 or R. SCOTT, The image of Constantine the Great in Malalas and Theophanes, in: New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St Andrews, March 1992, ed. P. Magdalino. Aldershot 1994, 57–71.

¹⁰² See DEBIÉ, Theophanes' “Oriental Source” 376–77.

¹⁰³ See, for example, the comments of BURGESS – KULIKOWSKI, Mosaics of Time 30.

¹⁰⁴ VARONA, Chronographical Polemics.

¹⁰⁵ The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor (transl. MANGO – SCOTT, iv). Against this view, see recently TORGERSON, Chronographia.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of Synkellos and Theophanes has been severely influenced by prejudices about the cultural development of early 9th-century Constantinople, and it has been subordinated to this premise almost from its beginnings, rather than to the study of this joint work in its own right. The evidence for George Synkellos' Palestinian origin (or long sojourn) is very weak and should be disassociated from that of the Eastern source of Theophanes. This is because they are independent hypotheses, with independent arguments, which should not have been linked until they had been sufficiently tested. The hypothesis of Theophanes' Eastern source should be disassociated from any connection with the history of Greek chronicle tradition, or should be devoid of any literary content, because there is no evidence whatsoever that an Eastern chronicle tradition decisively influenced the composition of the work of Synkellos and Theophanes in technical or structural terms.

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