
JESSE W. TORGERSON, *The Chronographia* of George the Synkellos and Theophanes. *The Ends of Time in Ninth-Century Constantinople* (Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages 28). Leiden – Boston: Brill 2022. xviii + 458 pp. – ISBN 978-90-04-50169-0

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The monograph under review is among the most thorough and extensive analyses of the ninth-century Byzantine *Chronographia* to have appeared since 2015, when MAREK JANKOWIAK and FEDERICO MONTINARO published in the series *Travaux et Memoires* a collection of essays devoted to Theophanes. It is an extended version of the doctoral thesis 'Synchrony and Dissonance' that Jesse W. TORGERSON submitted at the University of California in Berkeley some ten years ago. The remarks that follow should be regarded more as questions than as criticisms. In the acknowledgments, TORGERSON asks readers to come to his aid by completing what is missing (p. XI), as his goal was to pose new questions and open the way for new interpretations of George Syncellus and Theophanes the Confessor. The author's suggestions are followed in this review, indicating some aspects of his topic that in my opinion have not been sufficiently explored.

The book is divided into three parts that contain a total of ten chapters. The first part offers the author's perspective on the structure of the two chronicles. The second discusses how George Syncellus and Theophanes the Confessor characterized particular rulers. The third explores the purpose of their work and different ways contextualising it.

Chapter One aims to reconstruct the text known to the early readers by eliminating all subsequent additions and revisions. TORGERSON emphasises the fundamental characteristics of the imperial Christian discourse that first appeared in the account of the conquest of Judea by the Romans. On pp. 52–56, he presents his view of the structure of the text, the linchpin of which was (in his opinion) the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans and the beginning of a non-Jew's (that is, Herod's) rule, which supposedly announced the advent of son of man, Messiah, marking a new millennium in the history of the world. The pages that follow (56–60) provide brief introductory remarks regarding the way in which the author identified the

chronology of particular events. TORGERSON accepts the interpretation based not on *Annus Mundi* but on the years of each ruler's reign. He explains at the same time that his aim was not to discuss details regarding who and how wrote the text, but to show how the work was understood by Byzantine readers in the ninth and tenth centuries and how it may have affected their way of perceiving reality. Thus, what matters is not whether the events to which the chroniclers referred actually occurred and whether their account can be considered credible, but the purpose that underlay the particular way of developing a narrative (p. 1). According to TORGERSON, the *Chronographia*'s authorship was of little importance for a medieval reader. Moreover, the division of its content was originally non-existent; it was introduced by various editors and interpreters (pp. 3–12). TORGERSON leans towards the view held by MAREK JANKOWIAK that *Chronographia*'s chronology was based on rulers' reigns and that the system of tables was the invention of its later copyists.¹ He is thus led to conclude that the work was narrative in character and that its aim was to recount the reigns of successive monarchs (pp. 12–17). TORGERSON stresses that all authors who tried to continue the *Chronographia* stuck to the chronological order of particular reigns and did not apply yearly divisions. This is certainly a convincing argument in favour of the new interpretation of the *Chronographia*'s chronological method (pp. 73–77).

The second chapter explores a *syncellus*'s role at the Patriarchate, his close ties to the imperial court, and his part in building imperial propaganda. *Syncelli* would facilitate certain rulers' rise to power, would carry out missions (e.g. diplomatic ones) on behalf of the state rather than the Church, and some of them would be appointed patriarchs. The author begins with proposals regarding George's early life (e.g. his ties to Syria and Palestine), but his main concern is with the function George discharged at the Patriarchate. I found this part of the book very interesting. Especially noteworthy are the sections devoted to George's role as *syncellus* of Patriarch Tarasios and also, according to the author, of Patriarch Nikephoros until the latter's supposed deposition by Emperor Nikephoros (pp. 97–104). Of course, this is nothing but a hypothesis for which there is no direct evidence, but it is supported by arguments that seem quite convincing. Equally interesting is the account of the causes of the 808 rebellion and of the Patriarchate's participation in it. In dealing with this issue, TORGERSON examines the

1. MAREK JANKOWIAK, *Framing Universal History: Syncellus' Canon and Theophanes' Rubrics*. *Travaux et Memoires* 19 (2015) pp. 53–72 at p. 58.

places of particular officials in the internal structure of the Constantinopolitan Church. His line of reasoning is also convincing in its combination of the account of the rebellion with the last fragments of *Chronographia* and the general message it was supposed to convey.

The concept of time that TORGERSON finds in the *Chronographia* is discussed in the third chapter. In his view, the present is considered to reflect the past, while past types of behaviour are in some way reproduced in the present. TORGERSON regards the idea of the ‘First-Created Day’ (ἡ πρωτόκτιστος ἡμέρα) that repeated itself four times (Creation of the World, Noah, Incarnation, Resurrection) and was identically ‘dated’ under three chronological systems (two of which referred to the loss of the lands of Egypt and Syria) as crucial for understanding how the *Chronographia* is organized. While his remarks regarding the significance of the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey can be hardly considered definitive, he is right to argue that it may make sense to read the *Chronographia* in a typological-prophetic mode (p. 145). This view agrees with my observations regarding the Abbasids’ uprising and the development of their caliphate (including the supposedly pre-announced fall of their state).² Particularly revealing of TORGERSON’s way of interpreting the *Chronographia* is a passage on pp. 146–147: ‘In doing so it prompted a reader to read the narrative looking for how early events could or would be set up as *types and shadows* of events that came later, an ancient past coming to fulfillment in the recent past or present. The implications were that the current age is the constant fulfillment of past moments that are lesser shadows of the present, their future. In the *Chronographia*’s formulation these shadows are *types of the*

2. B. CECOTA, The Portrayal of Abbasid Rulers in Chronography of Theophanes the Confessor. *Studia Ceranea* 12 (2022) pp. 339–350 at p. 347: ‘To sum up, the relations mentioned above, located in the final parts of the Chronography, present the situation within the Caliphate in a decidedly apocalyptic tone, and perhaps suggesting that we are dealing with the moment in which the Muslim state was collapsing, the process which began with the Abbasid uprising in the mid-eighth century. Such construction of the narrative in Theophanes’ work is to some extent consistent with... the findings of modern day historians. I do not of course mean here the aforementioned rather impassioned descriptions, but rather the analysis of the balance of power at the Baghdad court, of which the Confessor could not have known very much (or did not consider it particularly interesting), and the research on which had led some to far reaching conclusions. According to these, the crisis of the Abbasid dynasty, the problem of leadership in the Muslim state, began with the civil war after Harun ar-Rashid’s death.’ Cf. IDEM, Islam, Arabowie i wizerunek kalifów w przekazach „Chronografii” Teofanesa Wyznawcy. *Byzantina Lodziensia* 43 (2022) pp. 396–398; IDEM, Powstanie Abbasydów i jego następstwa w ujęciu Teofanesa Wyznawcy. *Balkanica Posnaniensia* 29 (2022) pp. 55–69 and 30 (2023) pp. 7–21.

mind rather than *of the senses*.' Thus, readers in this interpretative community would understand history in relation to their present, seeing the past as a kind of prefiguration of current events.

Chapter Four highlights a call in Theophanes's preface to supplement his *Chronographia* in accordance with the principles of accuracy. For TORGERSON, this indicates that the *Chronographia* was not viewed as a complete work to be read in a passive way, but was supposed to be enriched with various elements of the present found in the past, thus getting closer to the global fulfilment launched on the First-Created Day. The author's focus here is on a new way of interpreting the preface that comes between AM 5776 and AM 5777 and is attributed to George and Theophanes. The call mentioned above is at the same time a reference to the role of Theophanes himself who was obliged to do everything in his power to bring the work of George closer to completion. By calling upon the readers to continue this task, he simultaneously justifies his own contribution to it. TORGERSON's analysis here is very interesting, too.

The second part of the book explores how the program of recounting history (presented in the first part) was realised in the description of particular rulers. TORGERSON thinks that the *Chronographia* should not be viewed as a representation of a series of historical events, but as a collective portrait of successive rulers. His fifth chapter deals with emperors who were considered to embody negative types, such as Leo III and Constantine V. The author links their portrayal with a father-successor narrative scheme, where the former's mistakes, usually committed as a result of deception, are then repeated by the latter, and the price for those mistakes is paid by the East Roman state as a whole. The scheme can also be found in the depiction of Constantine I and Constantius or Heraclius and Constans. There are certainly similarities to be discerned in the motives which the author analyses in detail (as, for example, in the case of two great rulers falling into heresy by lending credence to deceivers of either Arian or Monothelite persuasion). One can also accept the claim that the submissiveness to Monothelitism found in the *Chronographia* may have been linked to the Muslims' victories during Heraclius's last years in power and during the reign of Constans. It seems legitimate to raise the issue of combining the fiscal persecution with heresy (heretics are actually accused of imposing unjust taxes), but it is hard to agree that this was the most important indicator of poor government. In any case, if TORGERSON is right in taking the father-and-son narrative scheme as an introduction to the representation of Nikephoros as the emperor who actually performed the function of

anti-Christ, then his fall must have heralded a general rebirth. This, in my opinion, combines with the *Chronographia*'s last sections, which are devoted to the civil war that broke out in the Muslim state, announcing Islam's fall and the Christians' return to the east.

Chapter Six deals essentially with imperial portraits that can be regarded as relatively positive. The author's focus is not on the same pair of rulers as in the previous chapter. The father-and-son couple is replaced by other pairings: son and mother (Constantine – Helena) or brother and sister (Theodosius – Pulcheria). Pulcheria in particular, who sought the advice of spiritual men and was generous to the Church, appears to have served as the model for a good empress; all of the remarks regarding the process of building a narrative about her are inspiring and encourage further research. The analysis of how the account of the reigns of Irene and Constantine, taken as a whole, is structured in MS Paris. gr. 1710 is particularly interesting, since it provides a new perspective on the *Chronographia*'s view of those reigns. This does not mean, however, that it should be considered definitive: it adds to our understanding of the issue but does not resolve it. The reader's interest is captured by the account of a repenting empress. Also valuable are the remarks pertaining to the way of portraying rulers such as Maurice: such portraits contain the recurring theme of accepting responsibility for past mistakes, as well as the motive of greed leading to a final fall.

At this point TORGERSON offers a summary of his analysis so far. He argues that the authors of *Chronographia* focused on specific impious practices that manifested themselves in greed and credulity towards fraudsters who led people astray, into heresy. However, it was not heresy but a general tendency to give in to sin (primarily greed) that formed the main mark of a bad ruler. One might note here that sections on Leo III or Constantine V also contain references to another cardinal sin – pride. It is therefore difficult to claim that greed was the only significant sign of impiety.

The accounts describing particular emperors lead on in Chapter Seven to a discussion of the reign of Nikephoros, a ruler presented in a very negative light. As mentioned, TORGERSON treats the *Chronographia* as an imperial history supposedly related to the political present. His identification of references to both the Old (Pharaoh) and the New Testament (the Wise and Foolish Virgins) is particularly notable: it reopens the issue of the chronographers' engagement with Scripture, a practice which appears to have been quite natural at the time but is still sometimes questioned by scholars. A good example of such referencing can be found in the account

of a sin committed by the inhabitants of Pergamon before the Muslims captured that city during their march on Constantinople in 717.

Beside the Bible, TORGERSON points to other writings (e.g. in Romanos the Melodist's hymns) that could have been known to the *Chronographia*'s authors. His approach of interpreting the text from the point of view of those for whom it was written (as opposed to contemporary interpretations encumbered by present-day perspectives) is intellectually stimulating. Even so, I find his view that the whole work was designed as a propagandistic attempt aimed at bringing Nikephoros into disrepute (p. 311) too extreme. Likewise, TORGERSON explains in Chapter Eight that the portraits of previous emperors were used as examples to comment upon the authors' contemporary events: this may have been the case, but it can also be argued that there was an unconscious element involved in composing the work – its authors may have been attracted to those elements of imperial biographies that were similar to events they knew from experience. No content is created entirely according to consciously pursued goals; it can also be unconsciously shaped by various factors, such as one's upbringing and past experience. In any case, when read from the perspective of the Muslim East, the *Chronographia* produces an impression different from TORGERSON's, who claims that it can be taken to prophesize an apocalypse – one of a very optimistic kind, as it was about to put an end to the Muslim's empire, while at the same time bringing about the rebirth of the Christianity. It is difficult to accept this view as definitive.

The book's third and final section opens by discussing the *Chronographia*'s various possible endings. The text may have concluded originally with the events from 811 and 813. TORGERSON seems to suggest that this part was written in reaction to Leo V's return to iconoclasm in order to warn him against pursuing that policy and not, as previously believed, against revealing his intentions.³ The ending is thus considered to express the position of the iconophile party who supported Leo's candidature against their persecutor Nikephoros. Chapter Eight also discusses Arsaber and his rebellion. In addition to a solid prosopographical analysis, it provides informa-

3. This is the simplest explanation and as such it also seems to be the most reasonable one: MIROSLAW J. LESZKA, Leon V i chan Krum w świetle fragmentu Chronografii (AM 6305) Teofanesa Wyznawcy. *Przegląd Nauk Historycznych* 6 (2007) pp. 109–118 at p. 117: 'The lack of criticism of Leo V and Khan Krum's negative image (particularly the fact that he was referred to as a new Sennacherib) make it likely that this section of Theophanes's work was created after April 814 (Krum's death, 12/13 April) and before Leo V adopted an openly iconoclastic policy (December 814 – April 815).'

tion about Arsaber's son, Theophanes, who supported Leo's iconoclastic policy. The purpose of this analysis is to buttress what appears to be the right conclusion, namely, that the iconoclastic dispute was only one of the elements of the struggle for power in the empire, and not necessarily the crucial one.

Chapter Nine raises the question of the *Chronographia*'s popularity. TORGERSON argues that the work was subjected to partial revision during the reign of Theodora (842–857) in order to address the needs of a new dynasty. The goal of this reworking was to free Byzantine emperors from the suspicion that they gave rise to iconoclasm, and to throw it on the papacy and the Carolingians (the question is 'what for?', if the *Chronographia* clearly suggests that the blame lay with Muslim recreants and perhaps some Jews with whom Leo III had contact).⁴ It was also supposed to present Methodius as a legitimate Patriarch by indicating that Nikephoros properly exercised power against both the iconoclasts and the Studite monks. Remarks regarding the so-called Papal-Carolingian excursus shed much light the *Chronographia*'s various manuscripts. This excursus is a fragment pertaining to the establishment of relations between the pope and the Franks in the years 752–754. Depending on the manuscript, it was included either

4. See B. CECOTA, Edykt ikonoklastyczny Jazyda II w świetle Chronografii (AM 6215) Teofanesa Wyznawcy. *Byzantinoslovaca* 3 (2010) pp. 37–46 at p. 46: 'It would confirm the supposition that Theophanes's account was more propagandistic than historical. It seems that the Byzantine used it to achieve one goal in two different ways. On the one hand, the edict of Yazid served only as a background against which to show Leo's ties to iconoclasm. Similarly to participants at the Second Council of Nicaea, the Byzantine chronicler referred to Jews in order to demonstrate the foreign sources of Byzantine iconoclasm. On the other hand, however, he tried to involve Leo III in the problem of the edict by making skilful use of the figure of Beser. Simultaneously, one can rely on Theophanes's account for AM 6213–6215 for constructing the following logical line of events: the coercive baptism of the Jews sent them into ferment that gave rise to a messianic movement directed against, among other things, holy images. One of the members of the movement exercised great influence on Yazid, which resulted in promulgating the iconoclastic edict. Occupied with these ideas, Beser returned to Constantinople where he won recognition from Leo, who adopted his iconoclastic beliefs. Whatever one might think of this bold interpretation, it should be stated that Leo is the central figure in the account regarding the edict. However, this becomes clear only upon analysing also previous passages regarding the baptism of the Jews and the messianic movements that appeared among them. On the other hand, reference to the Caliph's rapid death discharged the function that could be referred to as moralising, as it was supposed to confirm the doom awaiting those who moved against holy images and, indirectly, against those who venerate them. It can be argued that Theophanes again warned rulers against interfering in questions of faith.'

under AD 722 or under AD 741, which entails totally different meanings of the history narrated: the former case suggests that the papal betrayal affected Leo III's heretical actions, while the latter sees it as resulting from them. Here, the author's line of reasoning is very clear and as such can be expected to inspire future generations of scholars to re-examine the question of how narrative was created in various manuscripts. These remarks seem even more significant than those pertaining to ways of presenting content (narrative or annalistic) that we can find in the monograph's first section.

The last part of the chapter (pp. 389–394) seeks to find out why the *Chronographia* became so popular that future writers kept referring to it and future generations kept reading it. TORGERSON says that the answer may have lain in the possibility of rewriting and readjusting the text to the needs of successive rulers (for example, those from the Macedonian dynasty). The actual answer may be simpler, as the author himself suggests a number of times: the *Chronographia* broke new ground; it constituted an epoch-making work, covering the entirety of history, or at least aspiring to do so. That is what made it a bestseller. If it had been created with a view to fulfilling a narrowly designed propagandistic project, as the author claims, it would not have become so popular among successive generations of Byzantines, or at least its impact would have been more limited.

TORGERSON argues that the *Chronographia* was first created for specifically propagandistic purposes and then underwent a number of revisions that adjusted it to the needs of particular readers. However, it is easier to link its success with the universality of the subject it addressed. It seems that this is a topic to be taken up in response to TORGERSON's monograph. One could use his remarks regarding George's polemic with Eusebius of Caesarea as a starting point: apart from undermining the credibility of a 'heretical' author, George naturally expressed his aspiration to be the author of the most universal work in history. TORGERSON himself stresses the range of the *Chronographia*'s impact and the ambition of its authors, whose historical gaze extended from the West and the Lombards to the Persian and Muslim East, including Armenia, Syria and Egypt. The monograph offers an excellent account of the criticism that George raised against Eusebius who was charged with chronological inaccuracies that may have arisen from pride (the cardinal sin). George also linked these charges with Eusebius's supposed inclination towards iconoclasm, of which Eusebius was accused during the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. This supports the conclusion that the chronicle was not written specifically against the icon-

oclasts, but generally against heretics. It expressed a devotion to ἀκρίβεια, understood as advocacy for reason, accuracy, and ways of thinking consistent with orthodoxy.

Chapter Nine introduces (p. 403) TORGERSON's explicit opinion that by the mid-ninth century the *Chronographia* had gone through several reworkings – which, we are told, opens new fields for interpretations. Let us note that a single transposed passage (see above) is insufficient to assert that the work underwent many recensions or was actually subjected to many changes. Perhaps further research will demonstrate that it was constantly rewritten.

Chapter Ten, finally, summarizes the issues discussed and the hypotheses formulated in the book. Worth noting are the author's efforts to compare the process of building the identity of the Macedonian dynasty to what the Carolingians tried to achieve through historiography and other literary genres. Another substantial conclusion is that the *Chronographia* should not be interpreted exclusively as a work of the iconophiles: of course this aspect mattered, but the chronicle was related to several other significant contexts and there is no need to reduce it to a single dimension. One should certainly agree with this opinion, and perhaps this position should have been clearly stated in the scholarly debate, although it seems to me that it has long been shared by many scholars who corroborated it in their research into various aspects of the *Chronographia*. It may be that TORGERSON's comprehensive interpretation of the chronicle was indeed needed in scholarly literature devoted to the topic. Also significant are his remarks (pp. 407–410) suggesting that it is possible to take the issue of the rise of Islam beyond the apocalyptic framework, focusing on how complex and perspicacious the *Chronographia*'s account is. This is what I have been trying to demonstrate in my own work.

I do not deem TORGERSON's interpretative method illegitimate, but I refuse to agree with the view that *Chronographia* is essentially unreliable in its coverage of events (pp. 410–411). It certainly contains inaccuracies (some deliberate and some resulting from ignorance), but in terms of the history of Islam, one is led to conclude that its authors provided many true details. Even though some of the accounts found in *Chronographia* were certainly shaped with a view to achieving a specific propaganda effect, the work provides an objective set of information that plays an important role in it.⁵

5. See B. CECOTA, The Jewish Theme in Theophanes the Confessor's Testimony on the Prophet Muḥammad. *Studia Ceranea* 13 (2023) pp. 255–269 at p. 264: 'To sum up,

Doubts are raised in the following terms: ‘By assessing the work on its own terms I found the *Chronographia* cannot be understood if it is thought of as a way of telling history, for it is a way of telling time. Not, however, telling time in the sense with which scholars have been concerned up to now, primarily considering time in terms of the relative accuracy of the work as a report on events. On these terms, the *Chronographia* is a distinctly inaccurate and untrustworthy historical source’ (p. 410). Fortunately, TORGERSON also acknowledges the work’s value as a source for the history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the seventh to ninth centuries (p. 412). It is worth remarking that even if *Chronographia* is just a collection of disparate material – a view which, as I understand, the author decisively rejects – its importance can hardly be overrated. After all, someone put this material in order according to a pattern.

To sum up, it should be emphasised that the monograph under review is certainly the result of painstaking research. It contains many claims that are either very well-argued or that can serve as a point of departure for further significant investigations. Nevertheless, I would like to address several issues that seem problematic to me. Since TORGERSON claims that the *Chronographia* provides significant information about the East, he also almost uncritically mentions that all of this information was derived from what is known as the ‘eastern source’ (pp. 10–11). Of course, it can be assumed that this source’s nameless author⁶ created the account of Islam that

the above introduction to the topic is hoped to give an idea how many issues regarding Muhammad’s relationship with the Jews can be touched upon based on a brief passage, only a few lines long, from Theophanes’ chronicle. In writing it, Theophanes certainly aimed to discredit the Prophet. However, he also included in it details that, when interpreted by comparison with other scholars’ findings that are based on other sources (including Jewish ones) pertaining to the history of Islam, may help us ask new questions and draw interesting conclusions regarding Theophanes’ view of Muslims.’

6. It should be noted that scholars have attempted to revise the generally accepted interpretation indicating Theophanes’s reliance on Theophilus of Edessa. The latest of those attempts was undertaken a few years ago by MARIA CONTERNO who tried to demonstrate that the chronicle of Theophilus was not the main source which Theophanes used in writing his own work. Her line of reasoning rests on a claim that the Confessor must have used and reworked several sources, and the question of what inspired him is more complex than is generally assumed. However, the problem is that we are not in a position to determine which sections of Theophanes’s work were based on specific Syrian sources, especially as Theophanes did not draw directly on Theophilus, using other works that contained excerpts from Theophilus’s work. See M. CONTERNO, *La ‘descrizione dei tempi’ all’alba dell’espansione islamica. Un’indagine sulla storiografia greca, siriana e araba fra VII e VIII secolo*. Boston – Berlin 2014, pp. 21–38. A good summary of the existing discussion of the use by Theophanes of Theophilus’s work was presented by the Syrolo-

George or Theophanes simply rewrote without interfering with its content. This view is difficult to accept, however, as is the opinion that the work failed to avoid changes by other copyists after the 840s.

Another question concerns the assumption about the new division of the chronicle's narrative. If it was actually meant to be an account of the reigns of particular emperors (pp. 16–17), then how can we explain entire sections devoted to events unrelated to their reigns (earthquakes, epidemics), which were introduced to inform us of what went on in the east? Were these additions illegitimate from the perspective of the architect of the original content, or did they serve some purpose? Or were they possibly the result of unreflective borrowing from the so-called 'eastern source'?⁷ In developing a theory as significant as TORGERSON's, one should be consistent. If it is

gist MURIEL DEBIÉ, who notes that authors writing on Theophilus have, for more than a decade, treated his work as a certainty (as if we had some manuscripts at our disposal), while, she claims, we are dealing here with nothing but a hypothesis aimed at explaining the possibility that there was supposedly a common source for the *Chronographia* – the work by Agapius of Manbij and the chronicle by Dionysius of Tel Mahre. According to DEBIÉ, Theophilus, who was a Christian of Chalcedonian creed, an orthodox with ties to the Abbasids' court, uninvolved in monastic life, perfectly fitted the theory of cultural exchange between Muslim and Christian worlds (to which DEBIÉ also raised her objections, claiming that it is difficult to speak of cultural differences based on faith alone. People of different religions who served at the Abbasids' court must have relied on similar, mutually comprehensible cultural codes). The aforesaid fragments by Dionysius of Tel Mahre and by Agapius do not allow us to determine to what extent Theophilus was an important source for them. The former emphasised that he had used only those fragments that remained consistent with his own doctrine, while the latter openly admitted that he had introduced many changes to Theophilus's work. Theophanes, in turn, never informs his readers of drawing on works by the chronicler of Edessa. DEBIÉ is therefore right to argue that while Theophilus is often mentioned, he is never directly quoted. See M. DEBIÉ, 'Theophanes 'Oriental Source'. What Can We Learn from Syriac Historiography?' *Travaux et Memoires* 19 (2015) pp. 365–382.

7. It is not an easy question, as conclusions based on the analysis of these accounts are out of line with those pertaining to the ways of representing natural disasters that afflicted the Arabs during the siege of Constantinople; see B. CECOTA, 'Plagi na muzułmanów. Kwestia epidemii w Chronografii Teofanesa Wyznawcy w relacjach dotyczących kalifatu i jego poddanych.' *Piotrkowskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 22 (2021) pp. 29–45 at p. 42: 'If Theophanes's most famous account of the plague during Constantine V's reign contains references to the supernatural, just like some of the accounts of earthquakes seem to be a portent of unfortunate political events to come, then the accounts of pandemic in the Syrian and Mesopotamian areas remaining under the Caliphs' authority do not play any of the roles in the *Chronographia*'s narrative. This means that Theophanes did not regard them as resulting from divine intervention directed against the infidels, as was the case with his accounts of the seas storms that took place during the siege of Constantinople and which resulted in the destruction of the Arab fleet.'

claimed on the basis of the oldest surviving manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Grec 1710) that ‘the *Chronographia*’s technique’ was not annalistic but narrative and that the work’s goal was to provide coherent accounts of each ruler’s reign (p. 48), then it is worth assuming that it was not the type of narrative characteristic of every manuscript and that it could have been developed by later editors and not by its original authors. It is clear that modifications entailed by the introduction of *Annus Mundi* were the result of editorial intervention that changed the way the work was perceived (pp. 61–69). Such changes must have made the work’s reception easier, which is clear as long as we treat it as providing factual material and not a narrative strategy. Simultaneously, it is worth mentioning that Paris. gr. 1710 can be considered to have offered an exceptional way of recording reality, which was aimed at providing a narrative account of the reigns of successive rulers. This, however, does not give the *Chronographia* its ‘proper form’: Paris. gr. 1710 is just one out of many versions of the work. On p. 74, TORGERSON expresses an opinion which is not entirely clear to me. He says that ‘medieval readers of the *Chronographia* knew the years of events in an active sense, by continually employing their own memory’. If this was actually the case, then one might ask why particular authors made any attempt to bring chronological order into their chronicles. TORGERSON could expand on this issue in his next work: this would certainly extend our knowledge of medieval people’s perceptive abilities, which must have been, it may be assumed, at a significantly higher level than they are today. It is clear that the author’s goal was to offer a new point of view. However, it is a risky approach to build far-reaching conclusions on one of the possible ways of understanding the word ἀφορμαί. While it has usually been taken to mean ‘material’ prepared by George and then used by Theophanes, TORGERSON gives it the more ‘poetic’ meaning of ‘impetus’, ‘starting point’,⁸ or ‘idea’, which, as he himself admits, is less well-grounded (pp. 149–150). Even if the author performed his task in the best possible way, it would still be good to emphasise more strongly the fact that he advanced only a *possible* interpretation that is clearly out of line with those adhered to for decades and based on a simpler and thus more logical understanding of the information regarding the *Chronographia*’s material. Even if the word was meant to convey the meaning of what was defined as ‘motivation’, the task with which Theophanes had been entrusted did not turn him ‘into the same sort of authorial persona as George: an author

8. CONSTANTINE ZUCKERMAN, Theophanes the Confessor and Theophanes the Chronicler, or, A Story of Square Brackets. *Travaux et Memoires* 19 (2015) pp. 38–40.

who passes a text on to a reader obliged to not criticize what is missing from the text but to complete it' (p. 157). It can hardly be assumed that he would have been able to write a work consistent with George's guidelines if he had not been given the material which George had prepared and which he was required merely to put in order. However, the possibility that he arranged the material has been ruled out by TORGERSON himself; in rejecting this possibility, TORGERSON relied on a number of other authors who researched the relationship between George and Theophanes.

The question that arises with regard to ideas expressed in Chapter Five is whether it is possible, for example in the context of the reign of Leo III, to find a correlation between the government that was considered 'bad' from a religious perspective and the defeats inflicted by the Arabs. The author mentions that during the latter years of Leo's reign, the Arabs only ravaged the empire for spoils, which is taken as confirmation of Heraclius's scheme. However, one might ask where this opinion stands relative to the battle of Akroinon,⁹ to which no reference is made.

In my opinion, it is not necessary to resort to revolutionary observations regarding the character of the entire text in order to draw sound conclusions about Theophanes's imperial images. The annalistic interpretation of the work supports similar conclusions, such as those pertaining to Muslim rulers.¹⁰ The concept that underlay the *Chronographia*'s chronological divisions is of little importance, since its content was not subjected to any significant changes. Therefore, I disagree with the monograph's conclusions that the divisions played an important role because the accounts that were not divided according to the annual scale can be interpreted as having been aimed at creating coherent images of particular emperors. Was this not also the case with the accounts divided annually? After all, the author did try to provide a coherent vision. (Although this, too, becomes questionable once the work is looked at from the perspective of its account regarding Muslims).

9. CLIVE FOSS, Akroinon. In: ALEXANDER P. KAZHDAN (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Oxford – New York 1991, p. 48: 'Akroinon first appears in history when the Arabs attacked it in 716 and 732. In 740, Leo III won a decisive victory there over the Arabs led by Sayyid al-Battal.'

10. B. CECOTA, Could a Caliph Be Virtuous? Selected Aspects of the Image of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan in the Chronography of Theophanes the Confessor. *Vox Patrum* 84 (2022) pp. 79–92; IDEM, The Portrayal of Abbasid Rulers, pp. 339–350; IDEM, Islam, the Arabs and Umayyad Rulers According to Theophanes the Confessor's Chronography. *Studia Ceranea* 2 (2012) pp. 97–111.

Finally, I feel obliged to mention that with some minor exceptions regarding works by Russian authors published in distinguished Western journals, of which the author could make direct use, he has failed to explore the significant Russian-language scholarship on Theophanes. TORGERSON mentions a few times that he was eager to become acquainted with IGOR SERGEEVICH ČIČUROV's major work on Theophanes, at least to some extent. To this end, he sought help from an interpreter (pp. 12 and 84).¹¹ He did not seek such assistance with a number of minor (but later) publications by the same author.¹² He was equally selective in utilizing works by YAKOV NIKOLAYEVICH LYUBARSKY, whose articles in German and in English are cited, while those published in *Vizantijski Vremennik* are ignored.¹³ (This leading journal is not referenced in the book even once.) And one more technical issue: it is unclear to me why on pages 239, 243, 245, 251 and 270, Pulcheria's husband is referred to as Maurice and not Marcian, Marcianus or Markianos, especially as Marcian appears in the source quotation and in the account of the fragment concerning Pulcheria's rise to power after her brother's death (pp. 247 and 249). This causes some misunderstandings, all the more so that a 'true' Maurice, a ruler from the turn of the seventh century, also appears in the monograph (p. 261).

The book aims to persuade us that the work of George and Theophanes was 'no panegyric but a manifesto for revolt against the evils in the imperium and for repentance and reform among the political community of Roman Christians' (p. 360). Perhaps this was in fact the chronicle's goal. However, analysis of sections regarding Muslim issues and Muslim statehood indicates that its content is very complex, often contradictory, and far from purely propagandistic. TORGERSON's perspective on the *Chronographia*

11. I. S. ČIČUROV, Византийские исторические сочинения «Хронография» Феофана, «Бревиарий» Никифора: тексты, перевод, комментарий. Moscow 1980.

12. E.g. I. S. ČIČUROV, Место «Хронографии» Феофана в ранневизантийской историографической традиции (IV – начало IX в.). In: Древнейшие государства на территории СССР. Материалы и исследования. Moscow 1983, pp. 64–79; IDEM, Традиция и новаторство в политической мысли Византии конца IX в. (место «Поучительных глав» Василия I в истории жанра). Византийский Временник 47/72 (1986) pp. 95–100; IDEM, Феофан Исповедник – публикатор, редактор, автор? Византийский Временник 42 (1981) pp. 78–87.

13. Y. N. LYUBARSKY, Наблюдения над композицией «Хронографии» Продолжателя Феофана. Византийский Временник 49/74 (1988) pp. 70–80; IDEM, Review of Čičurov, Место «Хронографии» Феофана. Византийский Временник 46/71 (1986) pp. 213–216; IDEM, Феофан Исповедник и источники его «Хронографии» (К вопросу о методах их освоения). Византийский Временник 45/70 (1984) pp. 72–86.

is certainly useful and increases our knowledge of it, but it is too extreme to interpret it as a work created with a view to serving one single purpose. I believe that this text's rich content will continue to surprise us, motivating further interesting research.

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