

## PRELIMINARY ENQUIRIES INTO THE PLACE OF THE *LATERCULUS MALALIANUS* AMONG THE CHRONICLES OF LATE ANTIQUITY<sup>1</sup>

James Siemens (SiemensJ2@cardiff.ac.uk)

Abstract: The chronicle played an important role in late antique historiography. It was, unlike a history, broad in scope: often serving to set local political or religious developments in wider context by means of annual entries that described events as they had happened through time and across different cultures. As deployed by Christian authors after Eusebius, however, concerned as such authors inherently were with time as the plane on which the divine will was enacted, chronicles took on an added theological dimension: one that would draw together concerns and motifs drawn from Judaism, and point, ultimately, to a future conditioned by the work of Christ. Of these, the sixth century Byzantine *Chronographia* of John Malalas represents a touchstone; the seventh century Latin *Laterculus Malalianus*, meanwhile, borrowing directly from it, amends the original text in favour of a new purpose of its own, while deepening any theological intent that had been present in the *Chronographia* immeasurably, and asserting a new future for humankind in Christ. Conceived in Greek but composed in Latin, and based theologically on Irenaeus's soteriology set in an eschatological picture reminiscent of Ephrem the Syrian's paradisaical imagery, it is this combination of seemingly eclectic characteristics and its potential for yield across later historiography, exegesis, the Easter computus, and even cartography, that makes the *Laterculus Malalianus* a worthy text for study. This present paper serves merely to explore the lineaments involved in its composition, and suggest ways forward for further work.

By any standard, the *Laterculus Malalianus* is a curious member of the specifically Christian family of late antique chronicles. Labelled *Chronicon Palatinum* by Angelo Mai<sup>2</sup> and *Laterculus Malalianus* by Theodore Mommsen,<sup>3</sup> both titles imply that the text is, in fact, primarily historiographical in nature, even while the first comprehensive study on it recognises, by virtue of its central-most content,

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of a dissertation submitted in August 2010 to the University of Wales, Lampeter in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a post-doctoral Licence in Divinity entitled "History, the end of all things, and the *Laterculus Malalianus*".

<sup>2</sup> Found in *PL*, 94, col 1167.

<sup>3</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 3; AA 9. "*Laterculus*" is here taken to mean "list" in the sense of "*fasti*", a meaning it had attracted by the early middle ages. See J. Stevenson, *The Laterculus Malalianus and the School of Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 1, abbreviated hereafter as *The School of Archbishop Theodore*.

that it is primarily a work of exegesis of the life of Christ.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps this seemingly confused construal that contributed to its neglect between the time of its first appearance as an edition in the nineteenth century and its most recent appearance, towards the end of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> The present article takes this situation as its point of departure. It intends to suggest, in light of a recent appraisal of the theology (and especially the Christology) of the *Laterculus Malalianus*,<sup>6</sup> that the theological reflection of the work on the nature of time and its consummation, by means of the genre of a late antique, Byzantine, chronicle,<sup>7</sup> is of considerable importance in the sense that it appears to draw together strands from across the early Christian theological tradition and to turn time and its computation to the service of a very particular eschatological vision.

Set to look, at first glance, like a Byzantine universal chronicle,<sup>8</sup> the provenance of the *Laterculus Malalianus* is the hand of Theodore of Tarsus,<sup>9</sup> who served as

---

<sup>4</sup> *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, p. 3. All references to the text of the *Laterculus Malalianus* over the course of this paper will be to the edition contained within Stevenson's volume, pp. 120/1-160/1, and will appear as 'LM', followed by Stevenson's translation, and the relevant page number.

<sup>5</sup> Although it had been noted by scholars before, Stevenson's volume, cited immediately above, represents the first systematic study of the text ever undertaken.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus* (Turnhout, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Whether the *Laterculus* can be described as early medieval as opposed to late antique is one issue that may be considered further in light of this present paper. Even if one were to associate the sunset of late antiquity with the early seventh century, then the *Laterculus*, authored as it almost certainly was in the second half of that century, is still chronologically close enough to warrant classification within the late antique family. Its characteristics as a chronicle, however, may be such that it belongs to the genre of a new period altogether – perhaps as herald – especially if the chronicles of that period manifest sufficiently similar concerns. What constitutes precise period characteristics, and even regional/linguistic characteristics in terms of chronicles and histories is a subject for separate study. For the purpose of this article “chronicle” will be taken to mean, almost without exception, “Byzantine universal” chronicle, and so, *de facto*, “Christian” chronicle.

<sup>8</sup> To this end, the last sentence of chapter 1 of the *Laterculus*, reads: *Incipit namque historia chronica quod etiam pari modo explanauerunt Clemens uel Theophilus et Timotheus dilectissimi Dei episcopi chronographi, et dilectus autem Dei chronographus Eusebius Pamphiliensis*. – “Here begin the historical chronicles, which in equal measure Clemens or Theophilus and Timothy set out, the chronographers, bishops most beloved of God, and also the chronographer dear to God, Eusebius Pamphilius” (p. 120/1). All translations of the *Laterculus* are Stevenson's unless otherwise specified. – Upon stating his purpose, however, the author immediately deviates from it, insofar as there is little of the historical chronicle (*historica chronica*) to be found in his work. That he is almost exclusively interested in contending with the issue of world age and at what point in history it was that the Christ was born, is not a characteristic foreign to Christian historiography; that the author of the *Laterculus* implies that his work is a chronicle, however, and then seems to draw upon John Malalas' *Chronographia* solely to dispute in what year it was that the Incarnation took place, before explicitly conceding to the chronicle genre only in the twenty-fifth and final chapter of the text, wherein he sets out a list of emperors, certainly forces a different interpretation on what is meant by “chronicle” in this context. The abrupt closing statement, *Explicit chronica Deo gratias; amen* (p. 160), is all the more poignant for this.

<sup>9</sup> A proposal first made by Jane Stevenson in her work on the text (cited above, note 3). Scholars such as Michael Lapidge (see B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge (eds), *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994) and especially Lapidge's appraisal of the evidence, pp. 180-82), Michael Herren (see his “Scholarly Contacts between the Irish and the Southern English in the Seventh Century,” *Peritia* 12 (1998), pp. 24-53), and Carmela Viricillo

Archbishop of Canterbury from his consecration as such by Pope Vitalian in 668, until his death in 690 at the age of eighty-eight.<sup>10</sup> The *Laterculus Malalianus* is a text that draws on the cosmopolitan experience and, more especially, the Greek and Syriac formation of its author,<sup>11</sup> while the most significant and interesting possibilities for historiography are firmly rooted in Theodore's appropriation of the intellectual traditions associated with the places of that formation. Above all, this appropriation includes an intrinsic appreciation for the poetic thought of Ephrem the Syrian and a fundamental command of the Irenaean principle of restoration.<sup>12</sup> Yet none of this would have any essential and explicit bearing on the issue of historiography if Theodore had not chosen to use as the loom for his work the sixth century universal chronicle of John Malalas, and not made significant reference to the *sex aetates mundi* and humanity's end at the close of those ages.<sup>13</sup> As it is, he did: combining a raft of images and ideas in a text that has few obvious precedents, and seemingly little to recommend its broader implications, even if it had the potential to contribute something quite new to the historiographical project of the period. Before addressing the nature of those images and ideas as they appear in the *Laterculus*, however, by way of understanding the background against which the text stands, consideration should be given to the nature of historiographical writing to the seventh century.

Essentially, the Christian recorder of history in late antiquity had the option of deploying one of two forms: the history or the chronicle. While some ambiguity developed around these terms, Cyril Mango's description of a history as "... giving a reasoned and polished account of events, which, ideally, the author had himself witnessed [and] hence was limited to a relatively short timespan," is a helpful one, especially as it contrasts with his description of the chronicle as "... written in everyday language [and] meant to provide an overview of everything that had happened since the Creation of the world down to the compiler's lifetime."<sup>14</sup> Yet

---

Franklin (see her "Theodore and the *Passio s. Anastasii*," in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Archbishop Theodore* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 175-203) have all accepted Stevenson's thesis, while more recent work undertaken by this author further confirms the likelihood of it (see J. Siemens, "Another Book for Jarrow's Library: Coincidences in Exegesis between Bede and the *Laterculus Malalianus*," (forthcoming)).

<sup>10</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 4.1 and 5.8.

<sup>11</sup> See Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*. Prior to this work the most significant biography to be found is that of Michael Lapidge in Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School*, pp. 5-81.

<sup>12</sup> I first drew attention to these links in J. Siemens, "Christ's Restoration of Humankind in the *Laterculus Malalianus*," *Heythrop Journal*, 48.3 (2007), pp. 18-28 and "A Survey of the Christology of Theodore of Tarsus in the *Laterculus Malalianus*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60.2 (2007), pp. 213-25; see also Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*.

<sup>13</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 of the *Laterculus* are dedicated to an explanation of the six ages and discuss the question in what age the Incarnation took place, and while for the most part taken directly from the sixth century chronicle of John Malalas, they constitute a significant part of the text as a whole. Chapters 23 and 24, meanwhile, resume discussion of the six ages with the purpose of bringing the text to an eschatological conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> C. Mango, "Introduction," in C. Mango (ed.), *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2002), p. 6. Importantly, in the same essay Mango identifies the "ecclesiastical history" (such as that of Eusebius, whom Mango calls its "inventor") as a third form, and confers on it the status of being

these explanations, however indicative, do not exhaust what might be said about either histories or chronicles, especially beyond the Byzantine East. This is because for example, in the Latin West, as early as the sixth century, the terms “chronicle”, “annal”, and “history” were used interchangeably.<sup>15</sup> Inasmuch as a distinction can be made, Isabelle Heullant-Donat suggests that it was down to Eusebius, whose “...‘history’ favoured narrative, and [whose] ‘chronicle’ favoured chronology.”<sup>16</sup> Whether we refer to East or West, however, it is sufficient for our present purpose that we should hearken to this simple delineation, providing it is remembered that Heullant-Donat’s use of the word “favoured” hints at something less than absolute categories.<sup>17</sup>

Yet while these historiographical forms, inherited as they were from the classical world (with Eusebian developments), may have served as the principal framework for a Christian historical composition, they did not represent the only sources on which an author could draw for inspiration in interpreting that history. In that regard the Jewish-Christian theological tradition must be taken into account too. While there may have been an implicit motive for deploying one historiographical form or another in recording events, the more consciously theological purpose of late antique Christian historiography could be heavily informed by eschatological motifs native to a much earlier Jewish-Christian tradition.<sup>18</sup> This is because, as a

---

“... the most scholarly kind of historiography on offer” in light of its use of identifiable original sources. This accords well with the characteristics of the universal chronicle – called elsewhere a specifically Christian historiographical form (see Glassner’s comments cited at note 17, below) – as it likewise elaborates on classical examples in the interest of communicating a specifically Christian agenda, and thereby raises the genre to a new plain. See now also J. Lössl, “Early Christian Historical Writing,” in R. G. Dunphy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 553-63.

<sup>15</sup> See I. Heullant-Donat, “Chronicles,” *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Vauchez, trans. A. Walford (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 301-303; G. Dunphy, “Annals,” in Dunphy, *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, pp. 45-52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. However, to complement this conceptual distinction, see now also A. Grafton and M. H. Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), who point to the technological dimension of the development of “chronicle” and “church history” under the hands of Eusebius.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Jacques Glassner, in his entry on chronicles in *Brill’s New Pauly*, confirms the essential ambiguity that must surround any definition of the chronicle. Above all, he says that “there is no antique or medieval description of the genre” and describes how their nature can alter within a single work. It is worth noting here that Glassner associates universal chronicles – of which the *Laterculus Malalianus* seems to be an eccentric representative – with a specifically Christian form of historiography. See *Brill’s New Pauly* 3 (2002), p. 271.

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish-Christian tradition may be defined as an early theological tradition associated with specific authors of the Semitic Near East, generally Greek but sometimes Syriac in language, and bearing the marks of Semitic thought and Semitic hermeneutics. Among those authors and works that match this description are Aphrahat and Ephrem the Syrian from within the Syriac milieu, Ignatius, Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, Clement, the Didache, and Irenaeus. See Jean Daniélou’s magisterial *Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée I: Théologie du judéo-christianisme* (Tournai, 1958) for the terms of this description and further, more comprehensive, coverage. Its representatives from the Syriac world, meanwhile, are first suggested by Robert Murray in *Symbols of Church Kingdom* (1<sup>st</sup> Gorgias edition, Piscataway, NJ, 2004), especially at pp. 6 and 9.

primitive tradition, which was also soundly rooted in the Semitic religious milieu from which it emerged, Jewish-Christianity shared with its Judaic antecedent an inherent interest in chronology based on the anticipation of an integral future event: the coming of the Messiah, whether for the second or for the first time. To Jews first, then Christians – and particularly for the community of Christians that grew in close proximity to their Jewish forebears – the timeline was of immense and understandable importance.<sup>19</sup> It seems, as a result, that it would hardly be possible to exaggerate the place of such Jewish-Christian historiographical influence for late antique historians, especially when considered in light of Warren Treadgold's contention that there was a dearth of serious Christian historiographical writing from the time of the composition of the gospels to that of Eusebius.<sup>20</sup> Thus, for example, that a late antique chronographer – if of a theological bent – really was limited to the Jewish-Christian tradition for interpretive help, means in turn that certain themes of the Jewish-Christian tradition are likely to feature in the same chronographer's work. The themes referred to here include "apocalypticism", "millenarianism" and the "ages of the world" (variously called the "world week" or "world age"), as found in the most prominent representatives of the tradition.<sup>21</sup>

By way of describing these themes, Jaroslav Pelikan actually goes so far as to portray apocalypticism as "... the mother of all Christian theology," saying further that it was so dominant a feature of early Christian writing that it overwhelmed any serious concern for the details of history.<sup>22</sup> But there is a natural correlation between the themes of apocalypticism and millenarianism, and so it was that the second of these constituted the principal form that the first would take. Pelikan explains this link as well:

"Probably the first indication that the [apocalyptic] prophecy...was being interpreted to mean an earthly reign of a thousand years following the return of Christ is that associated with name Papias. The only doctrinal position definitely attributed to him was the teaching that... 'there will be a millennium following the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ is to be established physically on this earth.' Irenaeus, with his reverence for 'apostolic tradition', described in glowing terms the transformation of the cosmos and the animals during the millennium; as his authority, he cited Papias.... The *Epistle of Barnabas*, for all its hostility to Judaism, seems to have appropriated this element of Jewish eschatology."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Jane Stevenson draws attention to the work of F.E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: a Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago, 1912), p. 27, which "...pointed out that the idea that the world is to exist for 6000 years followed by a millennium of rest is already found in Jewish apocrypha" (*The School of Archbishop Theodore*, p. 174), which would obviously necessitate a careful understanding of one's place in time.

<sup>20</sup> Of this, Treadgold says: "Though the four Evangelists and Julius Africanus were Christian historians of a sort, their works would hardly have impressed readers familiar with classical Greek historiography. While Christian theology soon came to rival pagan philosophy, so that Origen bore comparison with Plotinus, for more than two centuries no Christian produced a history comparable to those of Arrian, Josephus, or even Herodian" (W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 23).

<sup>21</sup> See note 18, above, for a list of these representatives.

<sup>22</sup> J. Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, The Christian Tradition vol. 1, Chicago, 1971, p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> J. Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 124.

Mango concurs, informing us that “[t]he belief in the impending end of the world was a cornerstone of Early Christianity, and [...] it was not a belief that could be lightly discarded,”<sup>24</sup> going on in the same section of text to describe the correlation between this apocalypticism and millenarianism especially in Byzantine literature.<sup>25</sup> But in light of this it is quite clear that apocalypticism, especially as manifest in millenarian concern, represented the dominant colour by which history could be interpreted by later historians. We must, however – again as a natural correlative of millenarian apocalypticism – include the theme of world age. If the world was created in six days before God rested on the seventh, so it was proposed, and if, as the scriptures say, “a thousand years in the sight of the Lord is as a day,”<sup>26</sup> then it served to reason that the world could only be expected to exist as long. The quint-essentially Jewish-Christian *Epistle of Barnabas* explains:

“Notice particularly, my children, the significance of *he finished them in six days*. What that means is, that He is going to bring the world to an end in six thousand years, since with Him one day means a thousand years; witness His own hand saying, *Behold, a day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years*. Therefore, my children, in six days – six thousand years, that is – there is going to be an end to everything. After that, *he rested on the seventh day* indicates that when His Son returns, He will [...] on the seventh Day, enter into His true rest.”<sup>27</sup>

In this one reflection, the apocalypticism that governed the Jewish-Christian mind is set out in terms of millennia and, ultimately, a cosmic week that would serve as an interpretive deposit which later historians could mine. And while this deposit was drawn on in different ways by different writers, by the fourth century, its influence on Christian historiography was pervasive.

Now we have determined that the lineage of Christian historiography in late antiquity is not to be traced through classical historiographical forms alone. In the virtual absence of Christian historiographical activity (in the narrower sense) from the *Acts of the Apostles* to Eusebius it remained to Jewish Christianity to bear the torch – albeit unconsciously – of any sort of historiographical hermeneutic. This it does by means of an unremittingly apocalyptic worldview that speaks in terms of thousands of years and a cosmic week of six days, followed by a seventh day of rest. So when Christian writers once again turned their minds to past events, they essentially had at their disposal two possible genres and a single interpretive framework. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that while to Eusebius, as progenitor among Christian historians, both a chronicle and a history can be attributed, neither of these warrant a great deal of attention in this context. This is because the *Historia ecclesiastica* for which Eusebius is most famous is not an especially theological document,<sup>28</sup> while the chronicle, which exists on its own only in fragments, hints

<sup>24</sup> C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome*, London, 1980, p. 201.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, especially pp. 203-04.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8 (RSV).

<sup>27</sup> The *Epistle of Barnabas*, 15, in *Early Christian Writings*, M. Staniforth & A. Louth, trans., London, 1987, p. 177.

<sup>28</sup> While the *Historia* undoubtedly exhibits certain theological features, it seems less interested in conveying an entire theology of its own. For helpful reflections on these questions see Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians*, pp. 26-32.

at a greater theological yield as it is appropriated by someone like Augustine – even if only indirectly.<sup>29</sup> And so it is to the latter’s approach to history, especially as seen in his *De ciuitate Dei*, that we turn in an effort to understand the next step in the development of historiography to late antiquity.

To be sure, Augustine is not a historian. He certainly looks to history, and even imposes on it a schema familiar from Jewish-Christianity;<sup>30</sup> but he does so with an eye that looks only for evidence of God’s salvific work. And therefore Augustine’s *City of God* is neither a history nor a chronicle. However, it is the very nature of this commanding work to engage the details of history in the service of theology. In the process, its author certainly draws on some of the historiographical themes so espoused in the period between Luke and Eusebius; but he does so in a way that eschews literal interpretation.<sup>31</sup> In this case, Augustine’s history is Jerome’s history is Eusebius’ history, but of course it is treated in such a way as to set Augustine in a historiographical category of his own.

G. W. Trompf calls *De ciuitate Dei* a “theodicy” – and in terms of the context in which Trompf sets it, it surely is<sup>32</sup> – but as such, Augustine’s purpose extends to the relation of the individual soul to God at least as much as it does to disputing pagan claims that the abandonment of the old Roman religion was the cause for the fall of Rome.<sup>33</sup> Of course there are many theological angles from which an author might have taken the historical picture descended from Eusebius. However, with the appearance of Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* the number of possible angles would have been considerably reduced. Augustine proposed very specific ways in which

---

<sup>29</sup> Robert Markus names only Rufinus’ Latin translation of Eusebius’ *History* and Jerome’s translation of his *Chronicle* as Augustine’s source for ecclesiastical history: R. Markus, “History,” in A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, 1999), p. 432. See now also J. Lössl, “Augustine of Hippo,” in Dunphy, *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>30</sup> See again Markus, “History,” especially p. 433, where Markus points us to Augustine’s *De Genesi aduersus Manicheos* (1.35-1.41) and *Contra Faustum Manicheum* (12.14) for examples of the doctor’s development in historical understanding.

<sup>31</sup> Even during the period from Luke to Eusebius, during which we see a dearth of Christian historiography, there were those who rejected such literal interpretations of Scripture as applied apocalyptically. Origen is one of these. He manifests his personal condemnation, for example, in *De Principiis* 2.3.5, where he disagrees with those who argue that theirs was an age to conclude many ages. Augustine’s discomfort with literal, millennial interpretations of Scripture is made clear at *De ciuitate Dei* 20.7, although it is equally interesting that Augustine admits here to having amended his position. Speaking on the view of some that “... there should be a kind of Sabbath for the saints [...] after the labours of the six thousand years since man’s creation,” he goes on to say that “I also entertained this notion at one time...” (trans. H. Bettenson, in Augustine, *City of God*, (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 907).

<sup>32</sup> G.W. Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retribution* (London, 2000). Chapter 12 of this volume is dedicated to a discussion of *De ciuitate Dei*, which Trompf entitles “History as Theodicy: Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei*,” pp. 255-82.

<sup>33</sup> There are many fine studies on *De ciuitate Dei* that explore the wide ranging and profound characteristics of the text, which extend well beyond what pithy comments may convey. In chapter 30 of book 22, however, Augustine’s description of the rest humanity shall find in God – the eternal Sabbath, or seventh day – is indicative of his fundamental concern for the relation of the soul to God. The text is here punctuated with pastoral assertions of hope for the collection of individuals who make up the city of God.

to take up Classical as well as Jewish-Christian motifs and his manner of deploying these motifs<sup>34</sup> eventually became a model for any future theological approaches to history – particularly in the Latin West. After Augustine it would have been much more challenging for any theological writer to choose a furrow other than the one first cut by this towering figure.<sup>35</sup>

For all the *Laterculus Malalianus* may have been composed in Latin, however, and so for all it might have been expected to reflect a similar historical hermeneutic to that of Augustine, it is, in fact, a text very much in the Byzantine mould and almost entirely indebted to authors whose origins lay farther East than Hippo.<sup>36</sup> From the Greek side, the most obvious specific source to begin considering in terms of understanding the historiographical context out of which the *Laterculus* emerged is the *Chronographia* of John Malalas. The *Laterculus* does, after all, borrow a good deal of material from this work, quite in addition to the fact that its author is called “the first Byzantine chronicler”<sup>37</sup> and the work itself represents “the most influential text for later chroniclers”.<sup>38</sup>

Happily, for our purposes, an enormous amount of work has been done on John Malalas and his chronicle in the last thirty years.<sup>39</sup> What interests us here, however, is Malalas’ purpose in composing his chronicle at all. It will have to serve – for the

---

<sup>34</sup> Trompf says of Augustine’s use of earlier historiographical tools: “His famous delineations of the Greek Week schema of history, admittedly, and his application of the body-history analogy, do not have a clear bearing on his retributive logic, yet the paradigm of an overall course ‘from paradise to paradise’ surely does” (*Early Christian Historiography*, p. 262).

<sup>35</sup> R. Rusconi, “Millenarianism,” A. Vauchez (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 775-76. However, note also the cautionary remarks on the limits of Augustine’s influence in late antiquity, e. g. compared to Orosius’, in J. Lössl, “Augustine of Hippo”, and id., “Orosius, Paulus,” in Dunphy, *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, pp. 1171-72.

<sup>36</sup> See for this Stevenson, *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, and Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*.

<sup>37</sup> A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 255-6.

<sup>38</sup> M. and M. Whitby, “Introduction,” *Chronicon Paschale: 284-628 AD*, trans. M. and M. Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), p. ix.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the edition produced by the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, ed. and trans. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, B. Croke (Sydney, 1986), together with E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, and R. Scott (eds), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990). Stevenson, in *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, has distilled much of their work down in relation to the *Laterculus* in the sections on the latter’s nature and sources (pp. 23-31 and 57-61). More recent than the Australian work is: J. Beauchamp et al. (eds), *Recherches sur la Chronique de Jean Malalas, I* (Paris, 2004), and S. Agusta-Boulerot et al. (eds), *Recherches sur la Chronique de Jean Malalas, II* (Paris, 2006). Meanwhile, Warren Treadgold’s essay, “The Byzantine World Histories of John Malalas and Eustathius of Epiphania,” *The International History Review* 29.4 (2007), pp. 709-45, and his treatment of Malalas in his book *The Early Byzantine Historians* (pp. 235-56) proffer a negative evaluation of Malalas and an important elaboration on his weaknesses. Treadgold directs his criticisms at a perceived fraudulence on Malalas’ part, suggesting that the *Chronographia* owes its few positive characteristics to Eustathius of Epiphaneia’s work, which Malalas claimed as his own, regurgitating it in inelegant and uninstructed words in the hope for some advancement in his career. If true, then Treadgold’s accusation could mitigate whatever credit is currently ascribed to Malalas for setting out a coherent, theological chronology. Whether it does or not, however, remains for future study.



sake of this brief survey – to accept the thesis that Malalas is most concerned to dispel local fears in a coming apocalypse by correcting an existing chronology which suggested that the seventh day of the world week was soon to be expected, and rather as something that had already happened.<sup>40</sup> Of course, by extension this in itself indicates subscription to the *sex aetates mundi* and the “World Sabbath”, but as pithy a summary as it may seem, it also acts as the terminus beyond which it is not necessary to explore for the time being.

Ultimately, in order to satisfactorily set the *Laterculus Malalianus* in context, a more extensive probing of Malalas’ *Chronographia* will be warranted, as would some attention paid to other major texts, for example the anonymous *Chronicon Paschale*, which precedes the *Laterculus* by less than a generation. The *Laterculus*, however, manifests no real awareness of the *Chronicon Paschale*<sup>41</sup> and its exclusive emphasis on christological exegesis in conjunction with chronography requires us to consider what it brings to the historiography of the period instead of what the historiography of the period brings to it.

In fact, the *Laterculus Malalianus* takes up every one of the themes and motifs assumed by the post-Eusebian historiographical tradition. It is a work that is based on a chronicle which, in itself, represents a late antique interpretation of an earlier historiographical genre. As such, it also assumes the interpretive framework of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic as rendered in millenarian terms and, further, the vocabulary of *sex aetates mundi*. Meanwhile it is also a text dedicated to expositing the work of Christ, whose ultimate purpose was the restoration of humankind: a fact that has been discussed at length elsewhere<sup>42</sup> and need not be revisited here in detail. Just briefly: Every event in the life of Christ is enumerated between chapters twelve and twenty four of the text and shown in some way to have recapitulated a corresponding dimension of human experience. All of this is cast in the framework of world history, for which account a significant amount of text is taken directly from Malalas, albeit with commentary added by Theodore. Soteriologically, it is all neatly summed up in the words *quidquid igitur in natiuitate, quid in aetate, quidquid in praedicatione, quidquid in passione, quidquid in resurrectione Christi, quidquid in ascensione Domini, quidquid in diuinis spiritus omnium linguarum elucutione, in sacramento uel ministerio sanctae catholicae ecclesiae gesta sunt, adque in augmento filiorum Dei peracta sunt...*<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> This is first asserted by Brian Croke in “The Chronology of Christ,” in Jeffreys et al., *Studies in John Malalas*, p. 18, cited by Stevenson, *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, pp. 21-24 at p. 23. It is at the beginning of book 10 of the *Chronographia* that Malalas undertakes his calculations, maintaining that more than the 5500 years calculated by Eusebius [sic] had passed between Adam and the Incarnation, and instead that the seventh millennium begins with the passion of Christ.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Stevenson does not list it among the sources for the *Laterculus* in her work on the text (see “Sources” in her *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, pp. 56-73), while this author has not been able to discern any specific influence either (see Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*). This does not mean that there are no points of connection between the texts, however, as this present work should itself indicate.

<sup>42</sup> See Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*; id., “Christ’s Restoration of Humankind in the *Laterculus Malalianus*,” and id., “A Survey of the Christology of Theodore of Tarsus in the *Laterculus Malalianus*.”

<sup>43</sup> *LM*, 22, p. 152. Stevenson’s editorial method has been to leave errors in the Latin text and to provide suggested corrections in the critical apparatus below. A “corrected” reading of this text can

However, it is in what follows after this text that the relationship between such a soteriology and history is made clear. Chapters twenty three and twenty four of the *Laterculus* are unambiguous in saying that the world, as its history unfolds in light of the Incarnation, is already in its seventh age. In light of the space dedicated to this idea, it must surely be of utmost importance for Theodore. His polemical tone may confirm this: *igitur expletum est sextum millarium aetatis huius mundi, aetiam quamuis contradicant qui hoc percipere nolunt, et septima agit saeculus his diem sollemnitate suae frequentiam....*<sup>44</sup> So most significantly for Theodore, as these closing passages of the *Laterculus* seem to suggest, the restorative work of Christ culminates not in a seventh day [age] of rest, but in an eighth, in which all things find their consummation: *Et tunc uere sabbatizabunt iusti cum Domino et diem primam fit octauam in resurrectionem sanctorum....*<sup>45</sup>

This is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, following on from Malalas, Theodore asserts that the world is well into the seventh millennium already. It has been ushered in at the passion.<sup>46</sup> This in turn implies that the Sabbath of the world is simply the temporal period of the new dispensation, which is to be replaced by something eternal. In chronographical terms, this has no precedent.<sup>47</sup> Compared to what we have called Jewish-Christian historiographical motifs, what Theodore sets out is different insofar as the question of ages seems to have been treated, within the former tradition, hebdomadally, with the eighth day set apart as something post-apocalyptic. In the *Laterculus*, rather, it appears as part of a chronological continuum and with a very different ultimate description. The passage from the *Epistle of Barnabas*, cited above,<sup>48</sup> aptly illustrates this difference. There, the advent of the seventh day is apocalyptic in nature, while the eighth day, when it is eventually introduced by *Barnabas* at all, is simply said to follow the Sabbath of the Lord and to be the “commencement of a new world”.<sup>49</sup> This stands in striking contrast with the *Laterculus*, where an eighth day is introduced, wherein, again, it is said *...tunc uere sabbatizabunt iusti cum Domino et diem primam fit octauam in resurrectionem sanctorum, quando area uentilata fuerit et a palea discretum est frumentum, quando non latet quod nunc latet.*<sup>50</sup>

---

be found in *PL*, 94, col. 1171. Stevenson’s translation, meanwhile, reads, “Whatsoever in his birth, whatsoever in his adult age, whatsoever in his preaching, whatsoever in his Passion, whatsoever in the Resurrection of Christ, whatsoever in the ascension of the Lord, whatsoever in the holy speech through the Spirit in all languages, and in the sacraments and ministry of the holy Catholic church is done and performed for the increase of the sons of God” (p. 153).

<sup>44</sup> *LM*, 24, “Therefore the six thousands of the age of this world have been fulfilled, even though people may deny it, who do not wish to perceive it, and the seventh age brings this day of his solemnity nearer...” (p. 154/5).

<sup>45</sup> *LM*, 24, “And then the just will truly experience the Sabbath with God, and the first day will become the octave in the Resurrection of the saints...” (p. 156/7).

<sup>46</sup> See above, n, 40.

<sup>47</sup> Stevenson, *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, p. 25. Note 12 is particularly interesting for its reference to Julian of Toledo, and the Jewish tradition of messianic expectation in the year 6000.

<sup>48</sup> See note 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Epistle of Barnabas* 15, p. 178.

<sup>50</sup> *LM*, 24, “And then the just will truly experience the Sabbath with God, and the first day will become the octave in the Resurrection of the saints, when the threshing-floor will be blown on, and the wheat will be separated from the tares, when what is hidden now will not be hidden” (p. 156/7).

However, yet again this latter understanding of the eighth day is by no means original to Theodore and the *Laterculus Malalianus*, but it is remarkable here for being so forcefully introduced into a setting in which it has no precedent, i. e. in the tradition of Greek historiography.<sup>51</sup> For rather than accepting an imminent apocalypse and a world Sabbath characterised by a literal thousand years of rest in Christ, Theodore draws on an idea of an eighth day that ultimately derives from Origen and runs through the works of later authors such as the Cappadocians or later Latin Fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine.<sup>52</sup> That Christians should already be living, without apocalyptic alarm, in the seventh age is consistent, for example, with Robert Cabié's description of Origen's seventh day: "Le repos du septième jour évoque la participation à la contemplation de Dieu après la création, qui fait de toute action du fidèle une continuation de l'œuvre du Créateur."<sup>53</sup> Thus the seventh day represented both by the *Laterculus* and Origen (as Cabié describes it), is simply an extension of the work of creation in response to God's action. The eighth day, meanwhile – again according to both Theodore and Origen – can be characterised by a recapitulative aspect, necessarily connected to the resurrection of Christ. This is the whole thrust of the *Laterculus*, which in Origen is represented by a comment proffered on Psalm 118:

"Avant que survint le jour huitième du Seigneur Jésus-Christ, l'univers tout entier était impur et incirconcis ; mais quand arriva le jour huitième de la résurrection du Christ, nous avons tous ensemble été purifiés dans la circoncision du Christ, 'ensevelis et ressuscités avec lui' comme dit l'Apôtre."<sup>54</sup>

The sense that the eighth, or paradisaical, day entailed perfection for Christians was held by many Fathers,<sup>55</sup> but its recapitulative dimension was taken into account more rarely. One rare other author in whom it may be encountered is Ephrem the Syrian, whose influence on Theodore of Tarsus was considerable.<sup>56</sup> In this case, it

---

<sup>51</sup> The *Chronographia* of Malalas is generally held to be the first universal chronicle, followed by the *Chronicon Paschale*, which terminates only in AD 628, and neither of these allow precisely such an interpretation of the eschaton. After that, it is only in the early ninth century that Byzantine chronography picks up again; see C. Mango, "The Tradition of Byzantine Chronography," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 12-13 (1988-89), pp. 360-72 at p. 360. If the *Laterculus Malalianus*, in spite of the language of its composition, can be counted among chronicles of Byzantine origin – which its provenance suggests it should – then it does, in fact, bring something new to the tradition.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Daniélou says of the idea of the eighth day that "[t]oute une tradition, dont témoignage en particulier Origène, entend le sabbat de la vie éternelle" (*Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme*, p. 360). With differences that warrant further investigation, Ambrose and Augustine along with the Cappadocians, are said to deal with the eighth day in similar terms by Gerhart Ladner in *The Idea of Reform: its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), pp. 222-38.

<sup>53</sup> R. Cabié, "Le dimanche et le Temps paschale au temps d'Origène," *Recherches et Traditions : Mélanges patristiques offerts à Henri Crouzel, S.J.* (Paris, 1992), pp. 47-60 at p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Psalm 118* (PG 12, col 1588), first cited and translated by Cabié, "Le dimanche et le Temps paschale," p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> See G. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, p. 226.

<sup>56</sup> See especially chapter 3 of Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus*; also Stevenson, *The School of Archbishop Theodore*, pp. 67-70; and J. Stevenson, "Ephraim the Syrian in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Hugoye* 1.2 (1998): <http://syrcom.cua.edu/hugoye/Vol1No2/index.html>.

is not that Ephrem specifically speaks in terms of an eighth day. The subject of paradise, however, which the eighth day represents, could be said to be of central importance to him. The resurrection of the faithful, meanwhile, an event that was held by Ephrem to take place both outside of time and at the end of time,<sup>57</sup> was the key for entrance into that paradise: paradise being a concept which served to describe the situation of humanity at the time creation as well as the eschaton.

Lest it be said that, for Ephrem, recapitulation lies in the fact that the paradise of the resurrection is the same as the paradise of creation, it must be stressed that it extends more deeply: to a fully articulated divinizing exchange. Sebastian Brock makes this point in a discussion of Ephrem's understanding of the purpose of the Incarnation, quoting from one of Ephrem's Nisibene Hymns:

“The Most High knew that Adam wanted to become a god /  
So He sent His Son who put him on in order to grant him his desire.”<sup>58</sup>

Finally, the fact that Theodore's language in the *Laterculus*, when describing his vision of the eighth day, is vividly agricultural, and in light of other reflections in his text of Syriac influence – somewhat evocative of Ephrem's own agricultural references with regard to paradise – can only be said to strengthen the possibility that Theodore is doing something original by bringing such language and ideas to bear on a genre that would otherwise have few points of connection with this sort of theology.

Ultimately, after what may be called a hiatus in historiography that arguably extended from the composition of Luke-Acts to the early fourth century, during which time the Christian community was more concerned with establishing the intellectual credibility of its faith, the discipline was eventually taken up again and developed by Eusebius, whose appropriation of earlier historiographical forms, practice of citation, and identification of sources, lay the groundwork for a new and respectable Christian literature. Then, drawing on motifs borne by the Jewish-Christian tradition for their interpretive framework, history and theology met in the likes of Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* as well as the universal chronicles that would come to dominate the Eastern historiographical landscape. It is out of this context that the *Laterculus Malalianus* emerged. A work of Eastern provenance – if first composed in Latin – and worked up from a section of the *Chronographia* of John Malalas, its author's primary concern of setting out an orthodox soteriology comprised of the theological principles and motifs he had adopted over the course of his education and experience, is more effectively conveyed for being cast in historical context and pointing its audience to an eschatological future. To this end the *Laterculus* recalls every historiographical image found in the Jewish-Christian armoury – from apocalypticism to the world week – but it does so in a way that reflects a much stronger interest in the theology than in the chronography. Indeed, the subservience of history to theology in the *Laterculus* extends Pelikan's adage regarding the prevailing apocalypticism of early Christianity over the details of history.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> S. Brock, “Introduction,” *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY, 1990), p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Nisibene Hymn* 69.12, trans. and cited by S. Brock, “Introduction,” p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Refer back to note 22, above.

So it is the theology of the *Laterculus* that bears closest examination for what it contributes to the historiographical project. Above all, this might be described as the application of the Irenaean notion of recapitulation to time, with an eighth, paradisaical, day superseding the first day of creation, and representing the absolute culmination of the work of Christ. Of course, this bears implications, including what it reveals about influences on the text, but more importantly what it might contribute to any subsequent works dealing with time and history whose authors themselves could have known the *Laterculus*. To be sure, then, there is work yet to be done; but it is certainly possible to affirm that the *Laterculus Malalianus* casts an interesting silhouette against the backdrop of late antique chronicles: for its deployment of traditional historiographical motifs in the service of a specific soteriological position; for its unusual interpretation of the *aetates mundi*; for its introduction of the eighth day as a recapitulative, paradisaical day into a historiographical genre. For Theodore of Tarsus and the *Laterculus Malalianus* it seems that history is simply the canvas on which the opus of Christ's work takes place: to the end of time and beyond.