

Patriarch Michael the Great: Beyond his World Chronicle

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In a recent issue of this journal¹, Dorothea Weltecke of the Freie Universität Berlin presented an extended analysis on the World Chronicle of Michael the Great, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch (1166 -1199). Indeed, her thorough treatment can be viewed as a most suitable encomium to Michael on the 800th anniversary of his death next year. Weltecke not only introduces us to Michael's magnificent work while highlighting its primary elements, but she also critically presents past and present controversial discussion among scholars on this work. Her precise analysis also sheds light on some of the peculiar circumstances of the late discovery of the chronicle. She zeroes in on the hypocritical attitude of some of the European scholars, contemporary authorities on Oriental and specifically Syriac studies. On the one hand, they exploited and plundered the work for their personal publicity, while on the other hand they denied it the recognition it deserved. In fact, some went further, by devaluing and belittling the work. As a consequence, Michael was portrayed as uninteresting to European scholars, and for decades they failed to study his achievements from a different perspective.

This brief Commentary seeks to add a few additional biographical aspects to Weltecke's fine analysis with regard to Michael's accomplishments as Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, his writings in general, and last but not least his chronicle. Most of these facts will not be known to the general reader, and most likely they will be known only by the scholars who are specialists of this subject.

The recent availability of an Arabic translation² of the chronicle by Mar Gregorios Saliba Shamoun, Metropolitan of Mosul³ provides us with additional "first hand" information on the chronicle that may help refine some aspects of the discussion, albeit it will create new controversies (or inconsistencies) when it

¹ Weltecke, Dorothea, *The World Chronicle by Patriarch Michael the Great (1126-1199): Some Reflections*, JAAS, Vol. XI, No. 2, 1997, p.6-29

² "The General Chronicle of Michael The Syrian, Patriarch of Antioch", Vol. I-III, Translated into Arabic by Mar Gregorios Saliba Shamoun, Metropolitan of Mosul, Edited & Introduced by Yohanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan of Aleppo, Published by Mardin Publishing House, Aleppo, 1996

³ In the following we refer to that as: *GCMS-AT, 1996*

comes to names and dates. The introduction to the Arabic publication was issued by the editor Mar Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan of Aleppo. Based on our references, a partial list of sources Michael used for his chronicle is compiled, but it will need additional effort to complete and adjust name transcriptions. We conclude with a brief discussion that underlines the tradition of chronicle writing within the Syrian Orthodox Church.

I. Michael the Great - A Syrian Orthodox Patriarch

It seems that not much first-hand biographical information exists about Michael, either in Syriac or in other languages. This may explain why we are still lacking a comprehensive biography of this outstanding figure. What is available is based on Michael's own writings primarily in his chronicle; most of the rest is from Bar Hebraeus; some information provided by Ibrahim is also obtainable from *Almajhul Alrihavi*⁴.

Michael was born in Melitene (today's Turkish city of Malatya)⁵ in 1126, a city on the right bank of the Euphrates and one of the main contemporary centers of Syriac Christianity. He is a descendant of the Qindasi family and his father was Reverend *Elia Al-Qindasi* (or *Qîndîsî*). His uncle was Athanasios Zakka, Bishop of *`An Zurba* (or *Ana-Zurba*), a city in Cilicia⁶. As a youngster, Michael joined the monastery of Mar Barsaumô, where he was ordained as a Monk after finishing his theological studies⁷. In his thirties, he became archimandrite of the monastery. By virtue of the functions inherent to that office, he became an integral part of the history of Mar Barsaumô for almost 10 years. In addition to his manifold administrative duties, he enlarged the library, added new buildings, and rebuilt the water supply system so that it enabled serving thousands of pilgrims each year at the feast of Mar Barsaumô.

⁴ Ibrahim, Hanna, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996, p.10; see also reference # 2, p.27, "*Tarikh Almajhul Alrihavi*", translated into Arabic by Albert Abuna, Bagdat, 1986. Since the introductions (by both the translator and the editor) of the recent Arabic publication contain many Arabized names, some of them difficult to convert to the known Latinized versions, we decided to transcribe them just acoustically and indicate this by a different font used for instance here for *Almajhul Alrihavi*

⁵ Two other famous sons of the Syrian Orthodox Church were born in Melitene:

Dionysios Bar Salibi, whom Michael called "Star of his Generation" and also the famous Bar Hebraeus.

⁶ p.10, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

⁷ p.10, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

Prior to becoming patriarch, Michael was already well-known as a writer and a historian. In referring to him, an anonymous chronicle states that “he was writing books all day long”⁸. In 1165 Patriarch Athanasios VIII (1139-1166) wanted to ordain him as Bishop for the diocese of Amid (today’s Turkish city of Diyarbakir), but Michael declined the opportunity⁹ lest it interfere with his desire to concentrate on his studies.

Right after the death of the Patriarch (1166), the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church gathered in *Deyr-Fesqin* (or *Peshqîn*) near Melitene to elect a new Patriarch¹⁰. Following an intensive discussion on a successor, the focus turned to three individuals, one of them being Michael. At first, he refused to become a candidate, because in his view the church was undergoing very difficult times. Once he agreed to the candidacy, he made his election dependent upon the strict acceptance of a list of canons aimed at strengthening the church. Not all of the Bishops accepted such a pre-condition, and a number of them had their reservations. Remarkably, a speech delivered by Dionysios Jacob Bar Salibi, Bishop of Marash and Mabugh, in favor of Michael changed the general opinion. In a talk which would later become famous, Bar Salibi appealed to the Synod to accept Michael as the rescuer of the tradition¹¹. In the end, Michael was elected to succeed Patriarch Athanasios VIII. He mentions that 28 Bishops were present for his consecration on October 18, 1166.

In accordance with a centuries-long interfaith tradition between the two churches, Michael contacted the Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria immediately following his consecration. He then traveled to the Monastery of Mar Hananya (Deyr-ul-Zafaran, near Mardin), where he issued 29 canons¹². Subsequently, he appointed Dionysios Bar Salibi to the metropolitan see of Amid. Later, he set off on a trip through the see of Syria and Palestine and met with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Amaury and the Patriarch of Antiochia Aimery. He was received

⁸ Hage, Wolfgang, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1966, p. 56

⁹ p.11, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

¹⁰ p.12, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996. E. Tisserant, *Michel Le Syrien*, Dictionnaire Theologie Catholique (DCT), Paris, 1928, Vol. 12. P.1712

¹¹ p.12, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

¹² cit. 171, p. 74 in P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance – Idee und Wirklichkeit*, Berlin 1960

with great respect and honor by both Patriarchs. Michael stayed in Antiochia about one year, and he went to Mar Barsaumô to call a Synod in 1169.

During his pontifical period, Michael ordained 25 Bishops¹³. But most especially, he sought to reform the Syrian Orthodox Church. His actions were targeted at the lax way of life of some contemporary Bishops as well as the practice observed in various locations where a cleric would pay money to become a bishop. He was a man of principle, even though some accused him of nepotism for appointing his nephew Gregory to Maphiryan and his brother *Saliba* (or *Sliba*) as a liaison bishop to the Churches in Jerusalem and Antiochia. He received some resistance from some of his disciples – a development that escalated into a temporary schism. One of them was Yuhanna Al-Qaluniqi, whom Michael removed from his position of Bishop in 1174. Another one was Bar Masih. Al-Qaluniqi for instance tried to stir up the Hakim of Mardin and the Emir of Mosul against Michael¹⁴. Indeed, a monk revolt and actions by some bishops who had been removed by Michael led to the temporary assignment of Theodore Bar Wahbun as Patriarch in Cilicia. The Armenian Catholicos Gregor IV and the Armenian King of Cilicia supported Bar Wahbun, since they thought they had jurisdiction over the Syrians in Cilicia¹⁵. Bar Wahbun was excommunicated from the Syrian Orthodox Church for his actions. In order to get support from Salahaddin, Bar Wahbun went to Damascus. He also tried to intrigue against Michael's brother, who was the liaison Bishop in Jerusalem¹⁶. Michael was upset about the entire affair and actually wanted to resign at the Synod in 1193, but the council refused his request¹⁷. The schism continued until 1193; but after the death of Bar Wahbun, good relations with the Armenian kingdom were restored, and King Leo sent gifts to the Monastery of Mar Barsaumô. For his part, Michael participated at the coronation of King Leon II in 1198¹⁸.

Despite the problems within his own church, Michael remains an important patriarch, quite aside the issue of orthodoxy. He was well-acknowledged as a

¹³ cit. 89 in Kawerau, p. 20

¹⁴ p.14, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

¹⁵ p.1713, Tisserant, DCT

¹⁶ p.1713, Tisserant, DCT; p.14, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

¹⁷ p.1713, Tisserant, DCT

¹⁸ p.78-79, Kawerau

scholar and theologian outside his church¹⁹. Even though not supportive of the Crusades, Michael maintained good relations with the Crusader states. They received him with honors when he visited the Churches in Syria and Palestine in the beginning of his pontificates and later in 1177. Michael was also well-known in the West. While in Antiocha in 1178, he received an invitation to participate in the Third Lateran Council, scheduled for March 1179 in Rome²⁰ but Michael declined to participate. He also had good relations with the Armenian Catholicos, Nerses and Gregory IV. Because the latter was allied with Greeks, he could not get Michael's full support in theological questions. The reason was that Michael was in disagreement with the Emperor's theological positions. For understandable political reasons, as the head of the Syrian Church straddling both east and west, Michael had to balance his relations between the Roman Emperor and the Moslem Emir²¹. In the context of the ongoing intensive unity discussions, he received repeated invitations from Emperor Emanuel I to go to Constantinople. The Emperor even sent his personal ambassador Christopher with a letter stating his strong wish to unify the Byzantine and Syrian Orthodox Churches²². Michael's theological paper entitled "*Arguments against Albegeuis*" was especially appreciated by the Emperor, who praised it publicly. Michael also met with Sultan Kilig Arslan in 1172, and he had intensive discussions with the Sultan's philosopher Kemal Ed-Din.

Michael remained a man of principle. Obviously he did not covet the office of patriarch. Outside his own church, his prestige was based on his noble and strong character, and also on his knowledge in science. He more than deserves the nickname 'Great'. As a Patriarch leading the Syrian Orthodox Church, Michael lived in a difficult period of history. The Abbasids were waning, losing power to the Crusaders who were conquering new places. In his chronicle, Michael mentions the suffering of Middle East Christianity as a result of their occupation – especially in Jerusalem²³. Additionally the Mongols were emerging as a serious threat to the existence of Christianity in general, and the eastern sees of the Church in particular.

¹⁹ p.1713, Tisserant, DCT

²⁰ p.56, Hage

²¹ p.1713, Tisserant, DCT

²² p.16, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

²³ p.14, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

Patriarch Michael I died on 7th of November, 1199. He was buried in a tomb whose construction he had authorized prior to his death, located in the northern part of the altar of the monastery Church of Mar Barsaumô. His successor became Athanasios IX (1199-1207), also an abbot of Mar Barsaumô²⁴.

II. Michael's Writings

Michael's library of publications left to the Syrian Orthodox Church is an impressive legacy. Some of his unpublished liturgical and dogmatic work has survived as well. In addition to the formulation of extensive lists of rules and orders, Bar Hebraeus who used Michael's chronicle as a main source for his history work particularly gives him credit for his efforts related to the canons²⁵. Obviously he was the first who touched this issue after the initial work of Jacob of Edessa (+708). Michael is seen also as one of the great poets of the Syriac language by others.

The following is – presumably -- still an incomplete list of Michael's publications as compiled from Ibrahim and Tisserant²⁶. To some extent, this has been refined by comparing the findings of these two individuals.

- Anaphora (preserved in several manuscripts, six of these in Europe) including a collection of prayers in alphabetical order
- Definitive structure of the pontificate of the Syrian Orthodox Church (actually a revision) and its Rituals (unedited as a whole, but several portions have been published or translated)
- Sedra
- Two metric homilies (one on John of Mardin and the other on Mar Barsoum)
- Homilies for Sundays and Church Feasts
- A collection of various canons (29 issued in Mar Hananya in 1166; additional 12 issued in 1174); Bar Hebraeus cited some in his book called 'Nomocanon'

²⁴ In fact, including Michael, between 1166 and 1282 four Patriarchs were formerly abbots of the Monastery of Mar Barsaumô. This underlines the importance of the monastery as the contemporary theological center of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which was also the Patriarchal seat between the 11th and 13th century. The other center in the east was Mar Mattai, near Mosul.

²⁵ p.18, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

²⁶ p.18-19, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996 and p.1714-15, Tisserant, DTC

- Short poems (one of them on Bishop of Mardin)
- Theological writings, among them:
 - Arguments against Albegeuis (a faction opposed to the Latin Church) – written in Antiochia and sent to Emperor Emanuel I in 1178. The goal was to present it to the Lateran Council, but Michael later would decline to go there.
 - A treatise on the necessity of confession prior to receiving the holy communion (as an argumentative reply to Marc *Ibn Al-Qambar* from the Egyptian Church)
 - Reconstruction of the biography of Abbay of Nicea (copy originated from 1196 in the British Museum)
 - An encomium on Dionysios Bar Salibi
 - A metric composition in praise of a young Christian who had been persecuted for his faith in Mosul in 1159
 - Obituary on Mar Barsaumô

One must keep in mind that Michael was active during a period classified as the renaissance of the Syriac churches and a time of intensive discussion with other churches. It is also the era of the revival of Syriac literature, started early in the second millenium and ending in the 13th century, when “*the Christian Orient seemed to concentrate one more time all its efforts*” before meeting its painful fate under the hand of the “Turkish executor”²⁷.

III. The Chronicle of Michael the Great

Rediscovery and Confusions

Until the discovery of his chronicle, Michael the Great was merely known as a writer of legal, and liturgical texts. The discovery of the chronicle apparently initiated a slow shift in regards to his reputation and, as noted by Weltecke, this long overdue process is continuing among scholars. It is fair to say that Weltecke's work itself underlines the growing interest in Michael's chronicle.

Weltecke understandably wonders why “*the chronicle was never mentioned in Europe before the 18th century*”, even though Moses of Mardin, who himself transcribed Michael's work, was active in Europe and collaborated with some scholars²⁸. Obviously the chronicle was "ignored" by Joseph Simon Assemani,

²⁷ Baumstark, Anton, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922, p.285

²⁸ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.7

albeit it is explicitly quoted by BarHebraeus²⁹ in the preface of his church history published in 1721. Scholarly study of the chronicle started in mid-19th century, when an Armenian version reached Europe³⁰. For years, scholars believed that the Armenian version (utilized as a basis for Langlois's translation and published in 1868) was a complete translation. However, it turns out that the Armenian version was a shortened adaptation issued on request of the Armenian Catholicos Constantin I³¹ by Reverend *Yeshu* (or *Isho*) Ibn-Shammas Yakup Al-Tume Sharqi (born in Hasankef) based on the Syriac original with support from the Armenian monk Vardan (ca. 1246). Vardan had met Yeshu while in Cilicia. The translation was printed in Jerusalem in 1870 and in 1871 by Vardan who also added references to events that happened up to the time of Constantin I³². According to Tisserant, the publication (a partial translation) and the complete translation by Langlois, got W. Right (a known European historian and authority on Syriac literature) in trouble because he did not find related details described by Bar Hebraeus in the translations. He therefore assumed the existence of two distinct documents, one being the original of the Armenian version, the other one being a purely ecclesiastical chronology that was lost. This rumor was likely supported by the findings by Mgr. Rahmani's Syriac copy of Michael's Chronicle from St. Peter and Paul's Church of Edessa in 1888.

Though the Asian Society (*Societ Asiatique*) of Paris decided later on in 1894 to publish the chronicle, they failed to complete the project³³. Eventually, Jean-B. Chabot was able to publish it in 1899 in Paris, first as photographic reproduction (777 pages in-4' format), then, in the years 1899-1910, as a translation in three volumes (325 pages, 547 pages and 538 pages)³⁴.

According to Ibrahim, "another transcription" (Arab.: *nuskha farida*) of Michael's chronicle is available in the Library of the Church of St. George in Aleppo, based on the handwriting of *Michael Al-'Urbishi* who was a monk in

²⁹ p.1715, Tisserant, DCT

³⁰ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.8

³¹ p.25, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996; there are some inconsistencies with Tisserant, in terms of the year and the translator.

³² p.1717, Tisserant, DTC

³³ *Journal asiatique*, IX^e série, t. III, 1894, p.135 sq.

³⁴ p.1716, Tisserant, DTC

1558. To Ibrahim, this fact seems to be unknown among scholars³⁵. Some pages were added in recent years by Bishop Mar Dionysios Georgios Alqas Behnam. On the one hand Ibrahim points out that Chabot's photo-copy was based on "the original", but on a different Syriac transcription, and he cannot recall anyone who has done a comparison of both Syriac transcriptions. Therefore, argues Ibrahim, it remains unclear whether or not the "errors" in Chabot's translation are in the Syriac version he utilized. On the other hand, Ibrahim explains that the Aleppo version was transferred with other books from Edessa to Aleppo in 1924, at a time when people were forced to leave the city and migrate to the French-mandated Syria. Many books were sold at that time, when people were in dire need to build a new life. The chronicle, fortunately recognized as a treasure, has been saved as legacy.

Prior to the recent Arabic translation by Mar Grigorios Saliba Shamoun (Mosul, 1990) another Arabic translation existed, completed in 1759³⁶ by Hanna As-Sadadi, Bishop of Damascus³⁷. Other than this, several Garshuni versions seem to exist, but none of them helped in understanding the chronicle.

Sources Utilized by Michael

Since Langlois' and Chabot's investigations, one of the main motivations behind the study of the chronicle has been the identification of the sources utilized³⁸. Michael made use of an extensive list of direct or indirect sources, some of them historians of his time. Without him, their work otherwise could not be preserved to our time. He relies especially on contemporary accounts of Jacobus of Edessa (died 708), Johannes of Litarb (d. 737/738) and Patriarch Dionysios of Tell-Mahre (d. 845). In this context, Tisserant characterizes the chronicle as exceptionally important because the period following the Ephesus Council is based on a large number of Jacobite works that are lost. Michael also makes use of various letters and reports which enriched the authentic and detailed style.

Michael utilized additional contemporary sources, such as Bar Salibi and Jean Of *Kaysoum*. He complemented this for the period of Constantin-Tiberu II with material from Jean of Asia, and also borrowed from Ignatius of Melitene

³⁵ p.24, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

³⁶ p.27, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

³⁷ According to Ibrahim, five copies exist at the following locations: Library of Deyr-ul-Zafaran, Sadad (Palestina), Amid, Deyr Mar Marcus, and in London.

³⁸ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.10

(for the period after Constantin). In addition, he used a number of other documents (among them, the chronicle of *Azakh*), council records, local chronicles, biographies, theological pamphlets, ecclesiastical histories by approved Syrian Orthodox authorities, and excerpts of some of the Greek authorities. Living in a transitional time period and in a geographical area that had been the focus of several contemporary powers, Michael seemed to be aware of major works written by Greeks, Armenians, Arabs and Hebrew.

Both Tisserant and Weltecke refer to a list given in the thorough introduction of Chabot regarding the major sources utilized by Michael³⁹; a similar listing is provided within Ibrahim's introduction⁴⁰. Both lists provide a reference, inter alia, to Chabot who identified nearly 25 major direct sources. Nevertheless, a more systematic investigation remains necessary to compile a definitive reference list of what Michael used. The following table summarizes both listings, and it is an initial effort toward that objective.

Source list according to Tisserant	Source list according to Ibrahim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eusebius (from the Creation to Constantin) • Socrates to Theodoret (from Constantin to the Council of Ephesus) • Zakaria (from the Council of Ephesus to Justin II -565) • Cyrus of Batna (until the death of Tiberius II - 582) • Dinoysios of Tell-Mahre (from Maurice to the death of Theophilos - 842) • Ignatius of Melitene (from Michael II - Alexis I - 1118) • Basil of Edessa (from 1118 to 1143) • Dionysios Bar Salibi • Jean of Kaysoum. • John of Asia • James of Edessa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverend <i>Yohanna Rons</i> of Antiochia (in Greek 515); first this book was translated Syriac; it includes events, talks, etc. • Letter of Mar <i>Shamoun Al-Arshami</i>, 540; <i>Flivofiryos</i> • Pieces from the history Rev. <i>Qura al Bitmani</i> (Biography); 582 • Yuhann ibn-Samuel, Syrian historian who lived in mid 800 • Protocols from Iyavannis I, 754 • Letter from <i>Gewargis I</i>, Patriarch of Antiochia (790) written to <i>Kurieh Shamma Beth Na`ir</i> • History of Mar Dionysios Tell-Mahre, 845 (did not survive to us) • <i>Tarikh Dayri Sargisiye</i>, Ibin Jaji Rahib La`az (1024)

³⁹ see p. 1716, Tisserant, DCT. Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.10; Weltecke adds here that “*Chabot himself knew that this investigation of the sources of Michael was incomplete*”.

⁴⁰ see p.26, Ibrahim, *Introduction*, GCMS-AT, 1996

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Jean of Litarb.) • Apocrypha such as the chronicle of Azakh and lives of the prophets (such as “pseudo-epiphany”, the “pleropories”, of John of Mayouma, John Philopon) • Chronicle of Andronicus • council minutes • biographies • local chronicles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tarikh Eliya Mitran Kisom</i> (1171) • two sections of the book <i>`inaye ilahiye</i> of Jacob of Edessa (780); thoughts against Bishop of Mardin • contemporary church history • History of Yulius Africanus • Andronicus • Esebius of Ceseria • Wanyanos <i>Rahib Iskandari</i> (Alexandaria), • Socrates and Soezmin • <i>Zakaria Uzkuf Madlali</i> • Johannes of Litarb • Ignatios of Melitene • Dionysios Bar Salibi
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Very few scholars seem to have studied the entire chronicle, which encompasses 21 books, each with a varying number of chapters. Its format and style is not easy to tackle. The basic format utilized by Michael consists of three vertical columns placed on top of a horizontal synchronic table. *Figure 1* shows two pages depicted from one of the Syriac transcriptions and reproduced in the recent Arabic translation. The translation itself gave up the column system. In the original format, the first column treats world history (ecclesiastical events), the second column church history (succession of the kings), and the third column captures various issues.

After Weltecke elaborates on the tradition of chronologies, she concludes that “*Michael’s method is not only in compliance with the general medieval methods, but it is based on a strong historiographic tradition*” and in its refinement it is Michael’s own invention⁴¹. Chronological lists that seem to be crucial for the understanding of the chronicle and appearing in the appendix of the chronicle are the list of patriarchs, the list of all Church synods and the list of the bishops ordinates. Weltecke points out that Michael’s work was aimed at readers like himself, well-trained clerics familiar with certain terminology⁴².

Certainly, Michael’s work and style of history documentation was refined based on prior chronicles. From his own church’s viewpoint, we can conclude that he continued a great tradition of historiography in the Syriac speaking churches and in particular in the Syrian Orthodox Church, a tradition which

⁴¹ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.26

⁴² Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.20

finally reached its pinnacle with the celebrated historian Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) who heavily relied on and borrowed from Michael⁴³. Jacobus of Edessa, Johannes of Litarb, and Dionysios of Tell-Mahre are the best known Syrian Orthodox writers of chronicles prior to Michael. Alongside some anonymous writers, Bar Hebraeus stands out conspicuously as a figure whose numerous publications include two important historical volumes covering both world and church history. If we take into account other non-orthodox but Syriac writers of chronicles such as Elias of Nisibis and Theophilos of Edessa, we can better appreciate the gradual development of high standards in regards to historical studies in the Syriac tradition.

Some Discussion

Weltecke's work is an excellent reference on the recent discussion of the monumental chronicle covering the period from the creation to 1199. She identifies three main purposes driving the study of the chronicle⁴⁴ since its discovery: a) its sources, b) its references to other mutilated or lost documents, and c) historical aspects.

The chronicle proved to be of great value for Church history and crucial in some aspects because of the many lost Syriac historians cited, and whom Michael used as sources for the earlier parts. It is important in regards to the history of the Crusades in Asia Minor, and it opened new perspectives for the study of Near East history. Michael's style can be characterized as reliable, with an emphasis on eyewitness accounts, particularly on contemporaneous events in his region. Hage aptly characterizes the style of utilization of sources as conscientious and Michael as a contemporary authority⁴⁵.

In her analysis, Weltecke discusses at length the reasons for the inadequate attention from scholars about the chronicle, and she points to some strange motivations for their attitudes⁴⁶. In part, she traces this to the narrow perspectives prevalent a century ago in Europe. It was a time when Oriental research was mainly viewed as a tool, and it was evaluated for its "political

⁴³ see p.20-24 in GCMS-AT, 1996, where Ibrahim provides an extended chapter dealing with how Bar Hebraeus deals with selected events described by Michael. Ibrahim points to some discrepancies, but also to agreements from Bar Hebraeus' point of view.

⁴⁴ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, p.10

⁴⁵ Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche*, p.5

⁴⁶ Weltecke, *The World Chronicle*, III, p.14-17

usefulness” for European imperialistic goals. She cites Chabot, Wright and other scholars to exemplify the widespread view, which can be characterized as cultural arrogance and from today’s perspective even as racist. It is therefore ironic that, to this day, Chabot’s introduction remains the principal treatment of the chronicle – even while it was his critical remarks which caused the chronicle to be relegated to the back burner, as too unimportant for other scholars to study. Having said this, there are positive signs on the horizon that Weltecke’s and future scholarly works will change the picture. In that sense, Weltecke’s work marks a turning point and it can be seen as an overdue challenge to Chabot’s critical evaluation.

