

El producto final que recoge el libro, como se puede inferir de parte de lo dicho anteriormente, es ciertamente excelente y de un rigor científico inapelable: un estudio compacto, libre de anécdotas, que queda centrado desde el primer momento en los problemas esenciales de estudio que plantea el manuscrito, a saber, el editorial y el traductológico, del que emerge, además, el de la autoría de la traducción griega. En cuanto a la edición, como ya he señalado anteriormente, ha sido cuidada en todos sus extremos.

Por cuanto acabo de enunciar, tenemos a nuestra disposición una edición de las obras de Arnau de Vilanova que nos ofrece importantes datos tanto sobre cuestiones teológicas, como históricas, traductológicas y lingüísticas, en distinto y diverso grado, de los siglos XIII-XIV. Con esta soberbia edición preparada por el Prof. Nadal contamos con un material de primera mano para profundizar en el estudio de la teología medieval en el ámbito de las relaciones intereclesiales, en este caso concreto entre la católica y la bizantina. Esta nueva publicación, la cual ha ido a caer en las manos más adecuadas para su edición, redondea todavía más si cabe la ingente y cualificada labor científica del Prof. Nadal, quien sin lugar a dudas es uno de los mejores conocedores que tenemos tanto de la lengua griega como del mundo bizantino.

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WELTECKE, Dorothea, *Die «Beschreibung der Zeiten» von Mōr Michael dem Grossen (1126-1199). Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext*, «Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium» 594, «Subsidia» 110 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), xv + 323 pp.

The *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, a universal history in Syriac completed in the late twelfth century, has long been treasured by historians interested in Eastern Christianity, the Crusades, Medieval Islam, Near Eastern agriculture etc. Historians of early Islam have begun to use the chronicle more and more over the recent years, recognizing its value, among others, as a source for the early Abbasid period. The chronicle integrates parts of the ninth-century Syriac chronicle of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē, which is older than most Arabic works dealing with early Islam. Although the glamour of its repute as a collection of contemporary accounts is somewhat diminished by the contention that ‘properly understood, ten pages of al-Ṭabarī’s work

probably have more to teach us about Islamic history than 100 pages of the great twelfth-century Patriarch-historian' (Chase F. ROBINSON, *Islamic Historiography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], p. 53.), Michael's chronicle is undeniably one of the most valuable surviving Syriac works.

It took the Patriarch at least thirty years to weave this chronographical tapestry. This is the metaphor that he himself used frequently when referring to his grand project in which he tried to document, analyze and *visualize* the events of this world. Now, 800 years after his death, the first monograph on his work has been produced at the hands of the German scholar Dorothea Weltecke. It was presented as a doctoral thesis at the Freie Universität Berlin and has subsequently appeared in the *CSCO Subsidia*. It deals extensively with the life of Michael and with his chronicle – two interrelated pieces of research that are connected by means of the overarching question of what drove Michael to undertake such a colossal project. The four central chapters of Weltecke's study are the following:

- III Patriarch Mōr Michael Rabō und seine Zeit
- IV Textkritik, Quellenarbeit und Sprachliche Form bei Michael
- V Chronographik: Grafische Aspekte der Historik Michaels
- VI Aspekte des Historischen Denkens bei Michael in Vergleichen und Kontexten

In other words, two of the four main chapters deal with Michael's life and thought world, and two others with his historiography. The latter two are sandwiched by the former.

To begin with the noteworthy findings and discussions in IV and V (pp. 127-196) (Some of these findings [with minor differences] have been presented in English as well in: "Originality and Function of Formal Structures in the Chronicle of Michael the Great", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3 [2000]): Weltecke presents a list of the contents of the 21 different books and the appendices, followed by a presentation of all the internal evidence for the dating of the various books. Although most books cannot decisively be shown to be older than the mid-1160s, she finds good reasons to believe that books I to XI were produced before 1167 and books XV to XX before 1180. One of the questions that remain is when and who wrote the history of the Turks in book XIV. If it originates in the mid-1140s, as remarks within the text seem to indicate, *and* if Michael wrote it, he would have been only about twenty years old, in which case it was probably a kind of preliminary study. Next, Michael's use of sources is

discussed. The subchapter in question surveys earlier scholarship concerning the identifications of sources (no less than 150 of them named in the chronicle) and discusses how the Patriarch selected, investigated and introduced his material critically. This is followed by a section on the transmission of the text. The text is accessible in the facsimile edition of Chabot's manuscript. Chabot had a copy made of Michael bar Baršaumō's manuscript written in 1598, which was itself a copy of another 16th century manuscript. The exact relation of this manuscript to the original is unknown. A partial investigation into the relationship between Chabot's manuscript and its Vorlage, now preserved in Aleppo in the Church of St. George, reveals that Chabot's copy is a careful reproduction. A number of colour photographs of the generally inaccessible Aleppo manuscript provide the reader with proof for this. The text in both manuscripts is, however, lacunose and graphically corrupted. Weltecke discusses to what extent the original 'synchronoptic' arrangement, with its unique three column system and chronographic canons, can be reconstructed. Her discoveries of distortions of columns and interventions of copyists in the graphics and the actual text are of use to anyone using the text in the future. The same counts for her frequent warnings about the discrepancies between the Syriac and Chabot's translation, which integrates parts of the Armenian recensions and of Bar Hebraeus' Chronicle.

This technical section of the book answers, as far as it can, how Michael designed and produced his chronicle in order to show the complexity and changeability of this world. But what drove him? Weltecke avoids giving an easy or constrictive answer to this question. Different pictures emerge from chapter III and VI. Chapter III consists of a vivid and insightful overview of the Patriarch's remarkably dynamic life in a remarkably dynamic world. Weltecke goes into some length to describe how the region of Melitene was a prosperous area and a centre of Syrian-orthodox culture. Michael was born there at a time when the region enjoyed relative stability under Dānismendid rule. However, after having spent his early years in the monastery of Mōr Bar Šaumō, Michael soon found himself in an utterly complex and volatile world in which the Syrian-Orthodox community was often crushed between the millstones of rivalling Crusaders, Turks, Kurds and Armenians. The difficulty of sound decision-making under these circumstances is most aptly illustrated by the controversy in Michael's monastery as to whether the installation

of waterworks would facilitate the access of pilgrims or rather make the place too attractive for potential conquerors [pp. 80-81]. When Michael became Patriarch in 1266 he was faced with such issues incessantly and recognized the importance of dealing with them through careful politics (albeit with varying success). Weltecke speaks of ‘the politics of being- informed’ [p. 109] that was needed to guide the community:

‘Und hier zeigt sich die lebenswirkliche Funktion von Michaels breitem Informatioshorizont. Der Grund für die Notwendigkeit, genau zu wissen, auf wessen Seite eine Stadt steht, ja, sich nicht mit einem groben »die« Muslimen, »die« Franken etc. zufrieden geben zu *dürfen*, wissen zu müssen, ob in einer Stadt mittlerweile eine andere Fahne weht als im vergangenen Jahr, ist nichts weniger als existentieller Natur: Anders war die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche nicht zu führen’. [p. 101]

Chapter VI, in its turn, paints a different picture of Michael’s interest in analyzing historical and contemporary events. It discusses the more theoretical, intellectual, driving force behind his project. In the course of the twelfth century a number of Syrian-Orthodox intellectuals debated the issue of theodicy in light of the suffering of the community and the apparent lack of control over its own destiny. John of Mardin had interpreted past catastrophes as proof that God was not actively involved with the affairs of this world. Just after presenting his views in a treatise, they seemed to materialize in the fall of Edessa and the attack on the monastery of Mōr Bar Ṣaumō. Michael described in some detail how the apparent lack of Divine support for the Church stirred up a vehement debate in his community, with Dionysius bar Ṣalībī contesting John’s view and formulating the different modes of God’s intervention in history. Michael’s work gives a mixed response to the issue, in the sense that he constantly tries to distinguish between God’s hand in history and man’s motives, actions and failures:

‘Er bricht also in Wirklichkeit den Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang dadurch auf, daß er gerade *nicht* bei jedem Ereignis nach Gott fragt, sondern über das Verhalten der Menschen nachdenkt.’ [p. 245]

Weltecke suggests not only that the debate was one of the driving forces behind Michael’s thinking but also that Dionysius bar Ṣalībī had originally taken the initiative to the project [p. 253]. If the

chronicle was indeed a prolonged response to this intellectual debate then, looking at its final form, one can say that it overshot the mark. ‘Universal history’ turned out to be more complicated than the ‘history’ of theological and homiletic abstractions and in its concrete shape too bulky an opus to be copied and disseminated easily [p. 264].

This final essayistic chapter is worth reading in its own right. The same counts for the other chapters. As for the introductory chapters, the brief history of the Eastern Churches in Ch. II.1 strikes the specialist as perfunctory, but is obviously aimed at a wider audience, notably Western Medievalists. The rest of chapter II deals with the development of Syriac historiography, beginning with its Eusebian roots. The author surveys the scholarly debate about the evolution of the genre of universal history-writing among the Syrian-Orthodox, of which Michael’s work, together with the Chronicle of 1234 and the Syriac chronicle of Bar Hebraeus, form the culmination. Regrettably Lawrence Conrad’s excellent contribution to this discussion in his ‘Syriac Perspectives on Bilād al-Shām During the Abbasid Period’ (in: M. A. Al-Bakhit and R. Schick (eds), *Bilād al-Shām During the Abbasid Period (132 A.H./750 A.D. – 451 A.H./1059 A.D.). Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām 7-11 Sha`ban 1410 A.H./4-8 March, 1990*), 2 vols. [Amman: History of Bilād al-Shām Committee, 1991], vol. 2, pp. 1-44) has not been taken into account.

A general point of criticism is the absence of good indices. There is only a name index, which does not include peoples and dynasties; a thematic index is lacking. This is all the more problematic because the titles of the subchapters are not always informative and because some of the sub-themes appear at unexpected places (e.g. the discussion of the Armenian versions of the Michael’s chronicle is to be found in the chapter on Michael’s life).

All in all, Weltecke’s work is a many-sided and thoughtful study of Michael the Syrian. It will be a companion to his work for a long time to come. The author’s critical reading challenges many of the rapid generalizations made in earlier scholarship and the results of her textual and graphic investigations will aid any future work on an edition of the chronicle.

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